

Speed Humps Strongly Criticised by Ambulance Service and Police at GLA Inquiry

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On the 11th December 2003, the Greater London Assembly Transport Committee began their inquiry into the “Impact of Speed Humps”. They had already taken written evidence from a number of organisations, but they invited the London Ambulance Service (LAS), the Metropolitan Police and the Slower Speeds Initiative to appear as witnesses in person.

Sigurd Reinton, Chairman of the LAS, and Peter Bradley, Chief Executive, spoke strongly against humps and other traffic calming measures that delay ambulances. The LAS answers about one million calls a year, of which up to a third are potentially life threatening. This includes 8000 that are later diagnosed as cardiac arrests. It is critical to reach such victims as soon as possible as it is known that even a minute’s delay adversely affects survival rates. They also mentioned a recent medical research study that had shown that one minute delay on treatment of such cases results on average in a life that is subsequently shortened by 11 days (damage to the heart muscles if treatment is delayed causes long term difficulties, even if the patient survives).

They claimed that delays of more than one minute were regularly occurring in London as that might be caused by as few as 10 humps traversed, and other devices such as road closures or “gate” narrowing could result in even higher delays. In addition from a recent survey it was found that ambulance crews added typically 5 minutes to outbound journey times so as to avoid humps, and 10 minutes on the return journey when they were carrying patients.

Sigurd Reinton said the analysis was primarily related to heart attacks (myocardial infarction) but there were many other life threatening conditions where delays also reduced survival and he hadn’t even taken those into account. His full report can be seen on the BBRAG web site at http://www.bromleytransport.org.uk/LAS_Report.pdf. The LAS were opposed to all forms of humps, including “cushions” and tables, but also opposed pinch points, gates, and horizontal deflections.

Ambulance driver John Mullin said he strongly objected to causing as much as two weeks shortening of his patients lives because of the delays caused by speed humps, and treatment of patients in ambulances was severely impeded when traversing humps (trying to insert a drip or give an injection was particularly difficult).

The Metropolitan Police also criticised speed humps, but mainly on the grounds that they caused damage to vehicles. They complained that “strategic routes” were not being kept clear, that the design of traffic calming schemes was often poor and they were frequently not consulted by local authorities. The first time they learned about a new scheme was often when they tried to drive through it.

The spokesperson for the Slower Speeds Initiative did not have a great deal to say but suggested pedal cycle paramedics as an alternative to ambulances (this raised some smiles among members of the committee, but Reinton pointed out that one or two were already in use in central London). The spokesperson also suggested that everyone should have a

defibrillator at home, and be trained to use it. Another traffic calming measure she recommended, to avoid the necessity for road humps, was to get the agreement of bus services that they would not drive faster than 20 mph irrespective of the speed limit - this would slow all other traffic as a result.

The Committee has not yet reached any conclusions and there will be a further meeting on the 5th February 2004, when representations from Local Authorities in London will be heard.

Some of the written submissions to the GLA Committee can be seen on their web site at <http://www.london.gov.uk/assembly/transport/2003/transpdec11/transpdec11agenda.jsp> or go to <http://www.bromleytransport.org.uk/Speed%20Hump%20Objections.pdf> for the BBAG submission.

Who are the Slower Speeds Initiative? They appear to be a front organisation for such groups as the Pedestrians Association, RoadPeace, Sustrans and Transport 2000 who are typically anti-car, but their web site at <http://www.slower-speeds.surf3.net> interestingly says nothing about their constitution, sources of funds or even who their leaders are.