

BBRAG NEWS

Bromley Borough Roads Action Group - No. 10 (July 2001)

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a contributed article from Duncan Philips - Scientific Officer at Bromley Council. Contributed articles or letters are always very welcome of course!

There is also mention of our Annual General Meeting coming up in September. Please try and attend if you can.

Note that a number of the articles in this newsletter give references to internet web sites. Apologies to our readers who do not have access to the internet, but if you need further information on any subject, I would be happy to assist.

This is also the first edition of the newsletter that is purely digital. In future we will be able to email you copies of current or back issues.

Roger Lawson, Editor

Well it may have been longer than normal since our last newsletter, but here is a bumper edition.

Topics this time include a couple of articles on speed cameras (and how to avoid them), the latest news on traffic calming schemes in the Borough of Bromley (and one in Lewisham), a brief note of the latest accident statistics in Bromley, news on the political front, a follow-up piece on "intelligent speed humps" and an article on one of our recent campaigning activities.

Following on from coverage of the air pollution issue in the last edition, we have

Speed Cameras

A subject of topical interest is speed cameras. Central government has plans to expand the number of speed cameras substantially, partly assisted by the fact that revenue from fines can now be diverted to fund policing and hence the cost of more cameras. The number of people being caught by such cameras is growing rapidly (if you haven't been caught yourself, you probably know of some friends who have). Increasingly cameras are being sited where they are hidden or are not so obvious, so that more people are being caught - for example the camera on the A20, near the Bromley/Sidcup road junction, was moved

to the left hand side of the road where it is much less visible to speeding traffic on the A20, when it was previously clearly visible in the central reservation. Other examples are in the road works on the M11, or on the inner ring road in Bracknell, where cameras have recently been sited immediately behind road signs. There are probably many other examples around the country.

Do speed cameras work? Well it is generally acknowledged that they have a good effect on reducing traffic speed in the immediate vicinity. For that reason they are technically recommended to be put in particular danger spots such as near road junctions. However the effect only lasts a few hundred yards at most so they are of little use on long stretches of road, and are very expensive to install and operate.

If you look at most of the ones in Bromley which are sited in roads such as Widmore Road where a high proportion of traffic is local, clearly they are effective in cutting traffic speed because most road users know where they are and slow down accordingly. In fact the only people likely to be caught are those poor visitors who are unfamiliar with the road and who therefore are also unfamiliar with the road hazards! You could well argue that it would make more sense to paint the speed cameras a prominent colour so that instead of criminalising these unfortunates, it would warn them to slow down and hence avoid creating a hazard in the first place. This tactic is actually followed in some countries.

Some other countries have abandoned them altogether - for example the Canadian Province of British Columbia recently removed all of them following an election promise to do so, as there was a feeling that their use made little difference to road accident safety, and they undermined the rule of law by criminalising normally law abiding citizens.

Does reducing traffic speed have any impact on road accident statistics? Well you would have thought it did, but the evidence is very sparse. For example, despite the rash of speed cameras and traffic calming schemes, the overall road deaths in the UK only fell by 14 from 1999 to 2000, and the number of minor injuries actually rose. Similarly in the London Metropolitan area, the road deaths have remained pretty static over the last 5 years. Although accidents at particular black spots seem to be cut if speed cameras are installed, it is not clear whether this effect simply wears off over time, or whether reckless motorists simply move elsewhere. There have been studies made of the contribution of excessive speed to road accidents (for example by police review of accidents afterwards), and although the data is complex and difficult to interpret it is clear that speed is not the primary cause of most road accidents. Plain inattention by drivers is one of the more common problems for example. Excessive expenditure on this aspect of road safety improvement may not be the most cost effective way to reduce the accident statistics.

BBRAG has no committed views on the subject of speed cameras because they are usually not relevant to the kind of urban traffic problems we get involved with, but if you have any views or comments on this subject then please let us know.

Note that some of the information in this article was taken from publications of the Association of British Drivers who campaign against speed cameras and inappropriate speed limits (web site: www.abd.org.uk, tel: 0800-358-9955).

Odyssey Speed Camera Detection

If you want to be warned about speed cameras, you may find the Odyssey Unit from Morpheous an interesting technical

device. Your editor recently had the opportunity to try one out for an extended period and can report that it is indeed very effective in picking them up.

Basically this box is a GPS unit linked to a computer which contains a map of the UK with all known speed traps marked on it. The GPS unit sits on your dashboard and is updated with the current location of your vehicle from an orbiting satellite. When you are approaching a speed camera it warns you by flashing lights and/or an audible buzzer. Note that this unit is perfectly legal (as are radar sensing devices), although the law in this area is likely to change in the future.

Is it ethical? Well it's not only very effective about warning you of speed cameras, but if they are sited at hazardous locations, it also warns you of such locations, so it could be argued that it could actually make a contribution to safer driving. However it's also clearly likely to be bought by people who want to avoid being convicted of speeding offences (is that a meritorious aim or not?).

The following is a picture of this item (it's only about 4 inches long).



For more information phone 0870-2401701 or go to www.morpheus.co.uk.

Biggin Hill Airport Update

In the previous newsletter, mention was made of the possible expansion of Biggin Hill Airport. The council appealed against the court ruling on the interpretation of the terms of the lease for operating the airport. The council's interpretation that the lease does not permit scheduled flights but is solely for "business aviation", ie. executive aircraft hire and some other minor activities, was upheld. This may not be the final nail in the coffin of the proposed expansion of operations at Biggin Hill, but it's certainly a major step in that direction. There seemed to be widespread opposition to this scheme.

Lewisham, Manor Lee Area

Some of our readers may be affected by a new traffic calming scheme in the Manor Lee area of Lewisham. For example, Manor Park which is a direct route into Lewisham from parts of Bromley is having speed cushions installed. One peculiarly stupid decision here is to install 3-across cushions in a road where cars are typically parked down most of each side of the road all day. The end result will clearly be that everyone will drive down the centre of the road so they straddle the cushions. When B.B.R.A.G. objected to this proposal, one comment from a council staff member was "well if that happens no doubt the police will take appropriate enforcement action", which is yet another example of how council staff regularly give silly answers to common sense objections.

Clearly in this case, the major safety problem in the road, if there was any, was caused by cars parking such as to constrict an already narrow road. This resulted in poor visibility of pedestrians crossing the road, and numerous minor accidents involving vehicles. As usual the residents seem more concerned with their own

convenience than they are with road safety.

The following picture shows a car driving over the central hump of the wider, less busy section of this road (your editor took several such pictures in a few minutes - over 50% of drivers drove over the central hump despite me clearly taking photographs of them, and the faster they drove the more likely they were to do this).



Legal Basis of Traffic Calming Schemes and Consultation

One question that regularly comes up is the rights of councils to build speed bumps. The right to construct traffic calming schemes is covered in the Highways Act 1980 and therefore, even if such schemes damage your vehicle, it is unlikely to be grounds for legal action. However, under two sets of regulations there is an obligation to consult various people about such schemes. Under the Highways (Traffic Calming) Regulations 1999 - (No. 1026) they must consult the police and "such persons or organisations representing persons who use the highway or who are otherwise likely to be affected by the traffic calming work as the authority thinks fit." Clearly local residents or businesses should therefore be consulted,

and BBrag puts itself forward as a body that represents road users.

Similarly, and even more specifically, under the Highways (Road Humps) Regulations 1999 (No. 1025) the council must consult "in all cases, organisations appearing to them to represent persons who use the highway to which the proposal related, or to represent persons who are otherwise likely to be affected by the road hump."

For those reasons, BBrag is usually now consulted on such schemes in Bromley but we can also cover roads in the area around. However, unfortunately this just means we have a voice, it does not mean that people have to listen. Only by general public outcry and political action do the minds of politicians who ultimately decide on these matters get changed.

Stanhope Grove Scheme

Mention in a previous newsletter was made of a traffic calming scheme (primarily speed humps) in Stanhope Grove and Lloyds Way, Beckenham. This was prompted by the new Howden Sports Centre, which is likely to generate more traffic in the road - and of course the developers could also be persuaded to pay for the cost (with the threat of otherwise objecting to planning permission as is now a regular feature of council policy).

BBrag objected to the scheme as we felt it was unnecessary, and guess what, so did a lot of local residents. A petition from 55 residents objecting to this scheme was presented to the council, but the Environmental Services (Ops) Committee still voted it through. Among the supporters of the scheme was Jane Green, one of the local ward councillors, who clearly thinks that the views of her own constituents should be ignored.

Unfortunately some councillors seem to take the view that instead of representing the views and wishes of the voters, they believe they know better and will force you to take the medicine of speed humps even if you don't want to.

News on Other Traffic Calming Schemes

Possible schemes are being looked at for Alexandra Crescent/Avondale Road, Bromley and for Birkbeck/Ravenscroft,/ MacKenzie Roads, Beckenham.

Three pairs of speed cushions have been approved for Hamlet Road, Anerley.

The 20 mph zone and traffic calming scheme for Grays Farm Road, St. Pauls Cray has been approved.

There is a proposal for a one-way scheme and 20 mph limit in Clevedon Road, Kenilworth Road and Royston Road, Penge.

Please contact the editor for more information on any of the above, if desired.

Bromley Accident Statistics

Total road casualties in Bromley for the calendar year 2000 was 1313, which is a decrease of 10% over 1999. Although this is undoubtedly good news, it is not clear as to the reasons for this fall, and whether it is statistically significant (there is considerable random variation from year to year in the accident numbers). On the latter point, you have to bear in mind that simple things like weather conditions can affect the numbers, and obviously the speed and volume of traffic does. Also several years have to be viewed to get a real picture of the trend, and there does not appear to be a consistent picture at

present. Certainly it is not clear that the considerable expenditure on numerous traffic calming schemes is having any impact on the accident numbers.

Change of Council Control

For those of you who don't know (it seemed to get only limited coverage in the local press), control of Bromley Council has recently changed. Previously it was controlled by an alliance of Labour and Liberal Democrats. However two recent ward by-elections were both won by the Conservatives, so it reverts to Conservative control.

Without wishing to make political points, as BBRAG is a non-political organisation, this may have some impact on the policy regarding expenditure on traffic calming schemes, but don't expect any revolutionary change in direction. However, it's possible your and my council tax bills may rise less rapidly in future.

Homesdale Road Congestion

Despite comments in a previous newsletter about the congestion near the council rubbish tip being fixed, apparently now that summer is back the problem has returned. Your editor can speak from personal experience of this having been stuck in a long jam one Sunday morning! More news is awaited on this subject.

Speed Bumps on the Internet

For those with access to the Internet, an interesting web site to look at is www.io.com/~bumper/ada.htm which is a site run by AATC (Americans Against Traffic Calming). It has some interesting references to accidents caused by speed bumps and also has a section discussing the problems they cause to people with

Spinal Compression and other medical back problems.

Thornet Wood Road, Bickley

When the traffic calming scheme for Blackbrook Lane was being discussed, one of the concerns of local residents was the congestion at the junction with Thornet Wood Road, Hawthorne Road and Barfield Road. There are now plans to construct a prayer meeting hall (ie. church) for the Plymouth Brethren on an empty site in Thornet Wood Road (nearly opposite the entrance to Bickley Manor Hotel). This will be quite a large building as it will accommodate up to 950 people, be in constant use, and will therefore no doubt generate a lot of extra traffic flow. Local residents are very concerned about this development and have formed their own Action Group to fight these proposals. If anyone else is concerned or would like to assist, please contact BBRAG for further information.

"Intelligent" Speed Humps

Our previous Newsletter mentioned a new type of Speed Hump that deflates if someone drives over it at slow speed, but stays rigid if they are going too fast. The following are pictures of this interesting device - more information can be obtained from web site www.engineeringtalk.com/news/noa/noa115.html



However, despite your editor driving down the street on which it is claimed to be installed, he was unable to find it to test out the claims for this new device.

Bromley Pageant of Motoring

BBRAG exhibited at the recent Bromley Pageant of Motoring in Norman Park. This is an annual event that attracts car enthusiasts, and we were there to spread the word about what we do, and hopefully sign up a few more members, which we did. The following picture shows our Chairman, John Nicholls (I think he is trying to resist the charms of the lady from the stand next to us).



Old Hill, Chislehurst

The traffic calming scheme for Old Hill, Chislehurst was approved by the council, but subject to planning permission being

granted for the development in Brenchley Close (the developer was going to pay for the scheme). However, planning permission was initially refused, but the developer has appealed to the Secretary of State. An Inspector has been appointed to hear the appeal and a meeting is convened for the 29th August at 10 am at the Bromley Council offices. BBRAG has made a written submission but anyone else interested in this matter can attend the meeting. Note that other residents of Brenchley Close are, quite rightly, strongly opposed to this development irrespective of the traffic calming issues, but BBRAG also feels that the proposed traffic calming scheme is inappropriate and a poor solution to the traffic problems in Old Hill.

Mayor's Transport Strategy

The Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, has published his transport strategy under the headline "It's time London stopped travelling second class", following widespread public consultation earlier this year. It can be downloaded from the internet from www.london.gov.uk. It includes proposals for a £5 charge to enter central London by road. Public consultation on that item seemed to be fairly evenly split, but needless to say, the residents of central London seemed to be more in favour than others (they will pay a much reduced charge).

Notice of Annual General Meeting

The next Annual General meeting of BBRAG will be held on Saturday the 22nd September at 10 am. Please make a note in your diary accordingly. More details will be supplied later in a separate note.

Air Quality Management in Bromley by Duncan Philips

In January 2001 Bromley Council completed its Stage 3 Air Quality Review and Assessment. The review and assessment process is a statutory function for local authorities and it has been in progress on a phased basis since 1997. The conclusion in the Bromley report is that all areas of the Borough are expected to achieve the air quality standards in the Air Quality Regulations 2000. This means that Bromley Council will not need to declare any 'Air Quality Management Areas'.

Details of the results of other local authority reports are available on the following web site:

<http://www.aeat.co.uk/netcen/airqual/> (use the scrolling menu for Air Quality Management Area declarations). It is anticipated that approximately 110-120 AQMA's will be declared nationally.

An important issue in respect of all the Stage 3 reports is that this is a developing subject and there isn't ever going to be a definitive end. While conclusions will be formed based upon the work undertaken to date, these can always be refined as the science develops and our understanding of the significance of the numerous input factors increases. As recently as three years ago, complex air quality dispersion models were not required to assess individual road junctions or lengths of road. We previously would talk about much larger areas and there was not such a high requirement for precision. However, when considering a very small area, perhaps 100m x 50m, the importance of each variable is very high indeed. The accuracy of the work is continuing to be explored as the science develops and the conclusions may change in future reports.

The Borough has no large industrial processes and the prime contributor to local air pollution is from road traffic. Fortunately, there are very few roads with high heavy goods vehicle counts and the total volume of traffic on the roads is relatively modest compared to other Boroughs. What we do have is a problem with traffic congestion and the impact that this has on air quality. This occurs mostly during the morning and afternoon peak periods but there are some roads and junctions where it occurs outside of these times. The solution to this is partly with traffic management and partly with social education. The social education aspect is particularly problematic to solve. It is not something specific to this Borough and it is an issue of concern and relevance to most towns and cities nationally.

Bromley Council is working on a number of aspects of refinement of the work namely;

- detailed traffic fleet assessment
- increase of air quality monitoring provision in the Borough
- detailed traffic speed assessment
- refinement of air quality dispersion modelling
- increase in weather data

As this new information is generated it can be systematically fed back into the air quality review and assessment process and thus improve the conclusions in future reports. These reports will generate a need for further refinement once again. As this work continues, our understanding of the subject and the significance of the numerous influencing factors will increase. To the general public the importance of the detailed refinement is largely irrelevant, but to air quality professionals it is crucial.

Further information on local air quality issues can be obtained from Duncan Philips at Bromley Council on 020-8313-4764 or e-mail

duncan.philips@bromley.gov.uk

Contact Information

This Newsletter is published by the Bromley Borough Roads Action Group, 8 Prince Consort Drive, Chislehurst, Kent, BR7 5SB. Treasurer and Newsletter Editor: Roger Lawson (Tel: 020-8467-2686, fax: 020-8295-0378, Email: roger.lawson@btclick.com; Chairman: John Nicholls (Tel: 020-8-467-8284). 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 happy to advise or assist anyone who is concerned about any traffic, transport or road safety issues in the borough.

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