

M25 variable limit fails to improve flow: - Scrap this White Elephant Now

Traffic surveys published recently by the Highways Agency show that the average speed of traffic through the "experimental" M25 variable speed limit section has actually fallen from 56mph before implementation to 50 mph afterwards, meaning it takes 11% longer to get through following the "investment" of some £4m in this "improvement".

Those with longer memories than a goldfish (which rules out all too many anti-car civil "servants") will recall that the purpose of this scheme was to *increase* traffic flows by ironing out the waves of stop start driving so often found on congested motorways. They promised us that we would get through more easily and more *quickly* by slowing down when told to do so by the overhead gantries which were triggered by congestion ahead.

ABD members will not need to be reminded that these limits are heavily enforced by cameras, set at as little as 56mph. Initially, these cameras only operated when the variable limits were in force, but, in the manner of these things, they were soon switched on at other times.

This use of cameras with the aim of improving traffic flows has already exposed the weasel words of the Tory politicians who promised that speed cameras would only be used in accident blackspots and not on open motorways.

Now, the absolute failure of this oppressive scheme to achieve its objectives has been revealed, why are the Highways Agency pressing ahead with similar projects around Birmingham and Manchester? They fall back on some lame statements about reducing carbon monoxide emissions by 15% (if this was so important we wouldn't have road humps, would we) and claim that "drivers prefer the smoother journey". Really.

The ABD would support the use of intelligent signage to warn of congestion ahead - this already happens on the M42 where the existing orange central reservation signs are switched to 50mph when there is congestion ahead, falling to 30mph when traffic is stationary. These limits are strictly advisory, of course, but would be just as effective as the vastly expensive M25 white elephant if the Highways Agency bothered to tell people what was going on.

The ABD message to Lawrie Haynes and his bandits at the Highways Agency is clear - get these fatuous speed cameras off our motorways NOW! Ring up and tell him for free on 0800 504030.

Highways Agency rattled by ABD and AA criticism over M4 bus lane.

When part of the ABD's press release was printed in Autocar alongside AA allegations of "mad road schemes", the

Highways Agency were obviously stung into action. Not only did an ABD committee member receive a phone call from their PR Director encouraging us to participate in their consultations, but a few weeks later their Chairman secured a full page interview in that magazine, aiming to reassure us that they are not anti car. His defence focused on the many things they are doing to improve road surfaces and congestion warning signage - needless to say he kept off the subject of speed cameras, trunk road speed limit reductions, bus lanes and the M25 variable limit. Wonder why.

London traffic speeds continue to fall

Despite the fact that traffic levels in Central London have been stable for many years, average evening rush hour speeds have fallen by 1.5 mph to 11.4mph since 1995, according to the latest DETR study (Ring 0171 890 3098 for a free copy).

Proof, if any were needed, of the local authorities deliberate policy of obstructing the flow of traffic and inconveniencing the travelling public.

Greater London Authority Bill gives Government new powers to rip off drivers

This Bill was quietly given its second reading before Christmas. It allows the government to cream off a proportion of the revenue from road pricing and office parking tax (although Prescott says it will all go on transport for ten years, thus admitting the eventual rip off). Of course, there is nothing to stop other funds being stopped before this, making the new taxes substitutional rather than incremental. Judging by the national lottery experience, expect this to happen within two years of any charges brought in!

On a slightly more positive note, the

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Government reserves the power of veto over road pricing plans, so they obviously do not trust whoever is elected mayor of London to act in the National Interest. We don't blame them.

The Bill also creates a GLA executive transport arm, Transport for London, which will take over the management of London's trunk roads from the Highways Agency. Anyone who has been infuriated by the ridiculous speed limit reductions and aggressive abuse of Gatso cameras on all routes into London could be forgiven for thinking they couldn't do a worse job - but don't count on it!

Prescott shoots holes in "Hypothecation" promises

The linchpin of last year's white paper was the concept of hypothecation - a word that could only be invented by bureaucrats.

It means that all new taxes raised from the long suffering driver are supposed to be spent on "Local Transport Projects" - which, as we all know, usually means more negative measures to obstruct drivers.

Prescott is already shooting holes in this promise in the latest of a seemingly interminable series of consultation documents - Only the first ten years income will be protected in this way. After that, it is open season to rip off the motorist for ever higher charges and not spend a penny on transport. Hmmm. Perhaps they will call it "Road Use Excise Duty". Even within the first ten years, spending on transport will depend on Mr Prescott himself being convinced that there are worthwhile transport projects to be funded.

This second point is a staggering admission - road pricing can still be introduced even where there are no potential improvements available. So much for hypothecation. It is interesting to speculate

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Please notify the Secretary.
(See page 2 for details.)

on what Johnny Two Jags would consider a "worthwhile transport project". Perhaps he is afraid that the minority of enlightened local authorities might use the money to build roads - and that would never do!

Meanwhile, the Adam Smith Institute is carrying out a definitive study on the acceptability (or otherwise) of road pricing.

CBI pushes for road pricing not parking charges

The CBI, unsurprisingly, is strongly pushing for tolls to enter cities rather than a tax on workplace parking. This is the latest in a long line of short sighted appeasements by this powerful employers' group, selling the motorists who are its members' customers down the line for a marginal short term advantage. This approach is typical of modern business - looking for ways to use legislation to have their competitors over for a dollar rather than standing up for what is right.

Meanwhile, yet another consultation paper spells out how parking charges would work - employers would be granted a licence for the maximum number of cars to be parked by workers at any one time. Schools and Hospitals may be exempt, and, of course, Local Authority premises will simply involve a "wooden dollar" transfer of funds from one budget to another.

Get the idea - this is to be a tax on purely private sector workers - the public sector will be largely exempt. Expect local authorities to go for parking taxes in preference to potentially unpopular tolls, in spite of the CBI's opposition, and watch the price of out of town office space go up as companies move out - leading of course to more traffic on the roads as fewer people can get to work on the train.

Traffic growth stalls in '98

Traffic on minor rural roads fell by 5% in the third quarter as against a year earlier, whilst motorway traffic rose by 2%, resulting in no change overall according to the DETR. Once again, green scaremongering is exposed by the facts - particularly the bleatings of the Council for the Partition (sic) of Rural England who claim that traffic will double on country lanes, which should all therefore have 20mph limits and gates to inconvenience rural drivers.

Tories pilloried in Local Transport magazine for anti public transport views

A publication called Local Transport Today, which is circulated amongst Local Authorities (Ring 0171 582 6626 to subscribe for £66 pa - if you can afford it, it is a good way of

keeping abreast of our opponents' actions) reported on the Tory input to a debate on traffic reduction. Naturally, they failed to mention any of the sound points that were probably made by two well known back bench Tories - Alan Clark and Theresa Gorman - but instead simply pilloried them for a couple of phrases which criticised the inconvenience and disease spreading properties of buses and trains.

This just shows how the anti car lobby seeks to manipulate its opponents into a position where they can be ridiculed - and shows why the ABD always takes a positive position that is pro all forms of transport. Eighteen months ago, an ABD spokesman was approached by the Radio 4 Today Programme news management department looking for someone to go on and denigrate buses and trains. We refused, saying we opposed anti car measures and were in favour of good public transport. Needless to say we didn't get on - they found someone else to set up

RAC and AA move closer to ABD position on gatsos

Both these organisations have been slammed by the ABD for failing to represent drivers' rights. But, encouragingly, they were both recently quoted in Autocar attacking Home Office demands for yet more speed cameras.

The AA's Andrew Howard said: "In order to maintain the quality of driving and the behaviour of drivers, we need more policemen enforcing traffic law, not just machines." Equivocal, perhaps, but a big step away from the previous AA position of blind support for the indiscriminate deployment of cameras on our roads.

The RAC have always, despite their recent image change, been ahead of the AA when it comes to safety issues. It seems that one of their spokesmen has been reading the ABD's material and taking careful note: "Speed isn't the problem, inappropriate speed is. We want more properly trained officers on high visibility patrols, and more consistent enforcement policies aimed at the most dangerous drivers. Doing that, instead of taking the easy option of reporting large numbers of motorists caught by speed cameras, would send a clear message to all road users." Quite.

ABD members who are also members of these organisations should keep at 'em - the message obviously gets through eventually.

Colchester slip-up

Colchester Borough Council have, over the last two years, been disrupting the High Street in its flagship anti-car project. The wide street, which formerly offered two lanes of traffic and generous parking space on both sides, has been reduced to one lane with a virtual ban on parking. The traffic delays have been

The Association of British Drivers

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For contact details see:
www.abd.org.uk/contacts.htm

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The ABD is run entirely by volunteers, so the more members who take an active role, the more we will be able to achieve. Contact any of the above members if you can help.

bad, gridlocking adjacent streets, but now the people complaining most loudly about the whole mess are ... the pedestrians! They are slipping over on the trendy York stone paving and twisting their ankles on the cobblestones that have replaced the smooth tarmac and concrete of more civilised times.

Limiters threat

Speed limiters are already fitted to lorries and coaches. (Visit member, Chris Lamb's web site at <http://members.tripod.com/~Cybertrucker/index.htm> for details).

Brussels originally wanted them set to 50mph on lorries, but the DoT, in a rare show of sanity, fought against it, and managed to get them set to 56, which is bad enough. As soon as they were fitted, though, some EU countries started campaigning for them to be set to 50, which is what they wanted in the first place.

An industry source reports that some new trucks are actually being delivered with limiters set to 50mph. There seems to be a pattern: governments agree to a compromise, then quietly do what they wanted all along. 62mph limiters on cars, which is what they were after in 1997, can't be far away.

FoE target MPs

"Friends of the Earth" are urging their supporters to write to MPs in support of the latest Bill, the 'Road Traffic Reduction (Further Provisions) Bill'. They are targetting the twenty MPs who have been selected in the annual Private Members' Ballot. The idea is to get these MPs to support the RTR Bill in preference to any of the others that may be put forward.

The purpose of the Bill is to force Government to adopt FoE's pet target figure of a 10 per cent reduction from 1990 traffic

levels by 2010 - which represents a reduction of around 33 per cent compared with the levels that would otherwise occur.

World News

Truth of "green" agenda admitted

The following appeared in the Weather Action January 1999 bulletin and originally in the bulletin, "The Week That Was".

Canada's Minister of the Environment, Christine Stewart, tipped her hand on the global warming issue and revealed her true agenda. Speaking to editors and reporters with the Calgary Herald newspaper, Stewart said: "No matter if the science is all phony, there are collateral environmental benefits. ... Climate change [provides] the greatest chance to bring about justice and equality in the world."

The problem with that line of reasoning, of course, is that it *does* matter if the science is "all phony". One after another, the scares are examined and fall to pieces. Sheep in Chile, claimed to have been blinded by the disappearance of stratospheric ozone, were found instead to have a bacterial eye infection. A study claiming that just a 40 percent increase in solar ultraviolet radiation would kill plants was found to have eliminated the day/night cycle; in short, positing that the Earth would stand still.

Weather Action's web site is at www.weatheraction.com.

Letters



Sir - I came across the following information on a BBC web site, http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/uk/newsid_232000/232283.stm.

The number of deaths on the railways in

1997 was 48 (with 14 killed on level crossings, I assume included in this figure). On top of that there were 265 deaths of trespassers or suicides. Given the number of passenger miles per year (the last figure I have is for 1996 at 38 billion rail passenger kilometers and 620 billion car passenger kilometers), this makes railways far more dangerous than road transport. If the roads were as dangerous as the railways there would be roughly an extra 2000 deaths a year.

Funny then that "it must be remembered that railways are the safest form of land transport".

Keith Walker

Rationale for technology abuse

Sir - I have just read most of your site and your views are in general similar to mine - I travel all over the world and drive in many countries. The UK and Australia must rate as the most repressive police states in the world.

I think that in general people miss the point about speed cameras / laser devices etc. You have to look at history in recent years to see why we have been conned by the politicians - they have been conned themselves and have now been painted into a corner.

Let me explain : - At the end of the cold war and the collapse of communism we had some "vested interests" in maintaining the status quo - but despite this the economic [realities] and people-power resulted in the demise of these regimes. This left the defence industries with a problem - nice big factories with no trade. Who were their best and most creditworthy customers? You've got it - western governments. What had these companies to sell? Tanks and high tech guidance systems were no longer required - but the technology could be. The philosophy they evolved was to lobby governments about surveillance and speed detection and how it could be sold for the "safety and security of

Write to On The Road!

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Contact the Elderly

DRIVE AWAY HER LONELINESS

Car Drivers required to drive elderly people to tea one Sunday afternoon a month.

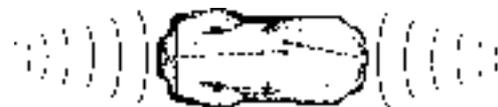
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the population" but at the same time it just happens to make the governments mega bucks. Legally and without question (for the most part).

Steve Goode

Web sites

The Weather Action site, mentioned elsewhere is well worth a visit, not only for their forecasts but for weather and climate information in general:

<http://www.weatheraction.com>

Two other sites which may be of interest are at the following addresses.

<http://members.aol.com/copradar/content.html>

<http://www.radarfalle.de>

Let us know what you think of these sites.

The Last Laugh

Height Kills!

By Andrew Bent

The traffic engineer was quite pleased with himself, he had finally managed to stop the local bus drivers trying to take their double deckers under the low bridge under the railway, so Councillor Prescott might finally concede that he knew what he was doing. But as he entered Prescott's office he saw that the councillor was in an ominously thoughtful mood.

'I see we've had a reduction in accidents in Railway Terrace' said Mr Prescott, 'yes' said the engineer, anxious to demonstrate his success, 'you see I did a survey and found that the maximum safe height under the bridge was 12'2", so I arranged for some warning signs to stop anyone taking a vehicle more than 12' high...'

But the councillor had already lost interest. 'I've been studying some statistics' said the councillor (the engineer winced, Councillor Prescott's grasp of mathematics was notoriously shaky) and it seems that when those new warning signs went up the average height of vehicles using Railway Terrace fell by 9 inches', 'Well, yes..' replied the engineer, 'and accidents dropped by 18%' continued

Speed Limits - How they are set and your right to object

The ABD has now printed a very useful Action Pack which sets out in detail the process by which Local Authorities set speed limits, and the rights that every member of the public has to object to the imposition of new or reduced limits. The pack costs £5 to non-members, but is available free to members. Please send a large sae, stamped (26p) to: The Editor, PO Box 3151, Colchester CO6 3JH.

the councillor triumphantly'. The traffic engineer tried to figure out where this was leading, Do you realise what this means? Every inch of average height reduction leads to a 2% reduction in accidents! All we have to do is alter the warning signs to read 11' and accidents will drop by another 24%!

His head spinning, the traffic engineer tried to reason with the councillor, 'but if a 12 foot vehicle can get through perfectly safely, what is the point in imposing extra restrictions?' Councillor Prescott was having none of this, 'you don't seem to understand, Height Kills, if every inch of height reduction causes a 2% drop in accidents, surely we must have a height limit reduction program, let's speak to the bus company and see if they can lower the single deckers somehow.'

The traffic engineer thought quickly, there was no point in trying to explain the facts, councillor Prescott always regarded knowledge of road traffic and accident causation a fatal disqualification for making decisions on the subject, but there was a possible way to turn the situation to advantage. 'There is another low bridge, under the disused railway in Beeching Close, where lorries do sometimes get stuck, but I haven't had the funds to tackle the problem before, I suggest that should be the first priority for the height reduction program'.

Councillor Prescott agreed and the traffic engineer set off for Beeching Close with measuring rod in hand. At first it wasn't clear why there was a problem at this particular bridge, there was already a height restriction of 7 feet, so why on earth were drivers ignoring it? After an examination of the bridge the reason became clear, the maximum safe height was over 14 feet. On receiving a recommendation that the 7 foot height limit was unrealistic and should be raised, councillor Prescott was apoplectic, 'lorries are getting stuck because they are too high' he yelled, 'surely the limit needs to be lowered'.

The engineer tried to point out that it was precisely because the limit was obviously ludicrous that it was being ignored, and that raising the limit would increase compliance, but the councillor did not understand. 'In Railway Terrace, reducing the height reduced accidents, therefore Height Kills' he argued, 'surely raising the limit in Beeching Close will increase average heights, therefore increase accidents,' 'But it isn't the average height that matters' the engineer tried to point out, 'a 14 foot limit will be taken seriously and will reduce instances of excessive height, therefore reduce accidents, whether the average goes up or down is totally beside the point'. 'But Height Kills' bellowed the councillor, 'no it doesn't' the engineer bellowed back, of course he should have said 'not necessarily' but this is not an easy thing to bellow.

'How can you say height didn't cause this?' Councillor Prescott produced a press photo of the mangled remains of a double

decker wedged under the Railway Terrace bridge and dropped it on the desk with the air of one producing the ace of trumps. 'The point was that the height was excessive for the situation, it is excessive height that causes the problem, not height itself' the engineer protested, but the councillor wasn't listening, 'I've already decided to introduce a height reduction program, reducing all existing height limits by a foot, if this succeeds in reducing heights, I'll introduce a host of new height limits, if it doesn't I'll reduce the limits further until it does...'. The engineer stopped listening; once councillor Prescott had made up his mind, there was no point in giving him the facts.

Highway men

More interesting characters from Peter Horton and others

Freddy Farmer. He is a fellow-conspirator with Teddy Tractor-Follower [see last issue]. Freddy does not believe in licensing a truck to carry ten tons of hay for ten miles between farms. He just uses a modified trailer section from an articulated lorry, hitched to his tractor, which carries no registration plates and few lights. He trundles onto the highway, running on untaxed agricultural diesel, muck-spreading on the road surface as he goes, for a leisurely trip to his next farm. In the process he collects a long tail of cars but never thinks about pulling into a layby to let the traffic pass.

Frankie Fogg-Brain. Frankie just loves those pretty red lights, especially the extra bright tail lights, that he switches on when it's dark and pouring with rain, so they reflect on the wet road surface. It certainly keeps other drivers well back from him.

But it's a different story when the weather is foggy. Then he keeps all his lights off to lurk like a ghostly presence in the gloom.

Martin the Middle Lane Hog. Martin resents being flashed; but refuses to take the one action that would stop it - move over. He believes that the left lane is for slow traffic, and the outside lane is for idiots in a hurry. His first cousin Oscar favours the outside lane. Neither ever breaks the speed limit (or thinks he does).

Did you know ...

... that Swampy had had a heart attack? Apparently he had been offered a bypass but refused it.

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