

On The Road

The journal of the Association of British Drivers

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GPS speed limiters — what they don't tell you

Oliver Carsten's research, done at Leeds University, was recently trumpeted by John Prescott. He said that fitting dynamic speed limiters to cars is a good thing. Whereas static speed limiters simply restrict a vehicle to a fixed maximum speed, the proposed GPS (Global Positioning Satellite) speed limiter would restrict the speed of a vehicle to the prevailing speed limit.

On page 11 of this issue there are some interesting points raised by ABD members about possible pitfalls of introducing GPS speed limiters. What's more interesting are the following extracts taken from Carsten's report, found in the conclusion. It's no surprise that these elements of the report have received absolutely no coverage at all.

"Drivers with the system will not behave like drivers without the system. The results indicate

news

that this altered behaviour can have negative implications.

"More disturbing are the results of the driving in fog. The drivers with a speed limiter system feel that the responsibility for indicating an appropriate maximum speed has shifted from the driver to the system. The system should know what is appropriate for the conditions and therefore, if the system does not force them to slow down, they need not do so. Drivers expect the system to be all knowing."

When Carsten was interviewed by various journalists he chose not to disclose any such shortcomings — in fact he went so far as to say that there were no drawbacks to the proposed system at all!

Police in a fine mood

The rate at which police forces issue speed tickets is set to quadruple. Eight pilot areas will allow cash from fines to be used to maintain the new film-free Gatsos and to fund collection of fines by magistrates. Cleveland, one of the pilot areas, expects to raise £1.8 m in the first year, from just five speed cameras and six red light cameras. The eight pilot areas

expect to raise £14m in revenue between them. The Treasury will still get revenue from the first 10,000 tickets issued — after that the money will go to the relevant police force. At the same time the Government is expected to increase the cost of fixed penalty fines from £40 to £60.

According to Kevin Delaney, traffic & road safety manager of the RAC Foundation for Motoring, and a former head of traffic at the Met, the move may

HOV lanes for Edinburgh

Lanes set aside for vehicles with two or more occupants are set to become the latest weapon in Edinburgh's war against the car.

Motorists who travel alone into the city could soon find themselves in even longer queues of traffic, as drivers with at least one passenger sail by in the priority lane.

City transport leaders believe that the scheme, which has already been tried out in Leeds, will eventually cut back the number of single occupancy cars so much that overall congestion levels will fall.

Mark Lazarowicz, Edinburgh's transport convener, and his predecessor Professor David Begg (Chairman of the Commission for Integrated Transport), believe a pilot scheme should be started in the capital. "We shall be looking at the possibility of such a scheme for Edinburgh. I think it is a good idea and it appears to have been very positive in Leeds," Mr Lazarowicz said.

The first roads being considered for the scheme in and around Edinburgh are the Forth Road Bridge and the A90 Queensferry Road where the average car occupancy is 1.2 people per vehicle.

Council sources said plans for the introduction

An obvious worry would be the fact that sometimes it's necessary to accelerate (beyond the speed limit perhaps) to get out of trouble. How many fatalities would there be as a result of people not being able to complete an overtaking manoeuvre?

What's most frustrating is that once again the part that speed has to play in the causing of accidents has been massively over-estimated. Deaths and accidents will be cut by up to two thirds is what we've been told. If speed is a primary causal factor in less than 5% of accidents, how can this be?

Interestingly we've been told that one of the benefits of this proposal is that speed cameras and traffic calming would be eliminated. But we are also told that anybody who tampered with the system on their car would be discovered immediately because they would be found breaking the speed limit. If speed detection equipment was abolished, how would anybody know that someone had broken the speed limit?

lead to a public outcry, potential backdoor privatisation of fine collection and the erosion of the police's role in traffic enforcement.

At the moment 91% of people pay their fines. If they start refusing to pay, the court system could jam up in weeks.

The other seven forces involved are Essex, Northamptonshire, Thames Valley, Nottinghamshire, South Wales, Lincolnshire and Strathclyde.

of the lanes are already well under way and a pilot project could be in place by March.

Lone motorists who break the regulations and use the HOV lane will be subject to an on-the-spot fine of £20 and have three penalty points put on their licences.

The idea was backed by TRANSform Scotland, the sustainable transport lobby group, which insisted it would encourage people to share journeys with work colleagues and friends. Colin Howden, a spokesman for the group, said: "It is about people sharing lifts and is one of several ideas which are being looked at by authorities and will be used more and more in the future."

Bristol fashion

A row has broken out in Bristol as John Prescott has given the go-ahead for the introduction of road tolls. But while the Government has agreed plans to drive motorists off the roads, it has held back on funds to provide a boost for public transport.

That means that while Bristol will be allowed to hammer drivers with the new charges, there will be no cash for alternatives like the long-awaited light rail project.

Bristol city council had hoped the announcement would clear the way for a tram scheme to be approved outright, but it was only given money for a feasibility study as the Government feels the scheme needs more work.

Council officials and the ruling Labour group have claimed that Transport Minister Lord Macdonald has given them everything they had asked for.

But opponents have described the announcement as a shambles which has left the

council's long-term transport plans in chaos.

Congestion on Bristol's roads is steadily worsening and the decision is cold comfort for motorists who are regularly stuck in traffic jams.

Lord Macdonald said Bristol would be one of 25 councils sharing £18 million to improve public transport ahead of bringing in road tolls, or workplace parking schemes.

Bristol has been given £6.4million, one of the highest amounts, and will spend £500,000 of that looking at plans for a light rail scheme between the city centre and the huge Bradley Stoke estate. That doesn't leave much to spend on infrastructure, bearing in mind that the remaining £5.9million has got to fund several projects.

The council has claimed that the Government had been supportive of the idea of such a light railway, and that it had taken an important step forward.

But there is no commitment to allow the council to borrow the money it needs for the scheme — which will be funded mainly by the private sector

— and road tolls cannot start until public transport is improved.

Bristol city council has said that Lord Macdonald's announcement has put the wheels in motion for work to begin on Light Rapid Transport, but there's no shortage of people claiming that the public face is putting across a message that is far from the private point of view.

Bristol Tory transport spokesman Richard Eddy said: "Previously the ruling Labour group had put their faith in John Prescott coming up with the goods to support their local transport plans. Instead he's left them with egg on their face and the citizens of Bristol with little prospect of the solutions to our city's transport problems for the years ahead."

The obvious question to ask, is why did anybody ever have any faith in John Prescott's integrity or ability? There are precious few people who have seen him deliver anything like what he has promised — and now he has simply passed the buck.

Virgin on the ridiculous

An angry commuter has blasted Virgin Trains for a 346% increase in a ticket fare for early morning rail users.

The company faced Kidderminster-based Tracey Guest's wrath for scrapping a £17 value ticket on the 5.49am Wolverhampton to London train.

The commuter instead had to pay £76 for the ticket for her journey to work at the Royal Medical College in London.

Virgin Trains said the change had taken place because too many customers were using the service that was designed for "leisure journeys only and not regular travellers".

Guest said: "How many people travelling at their leisure catch a train at 5.49am? I began using the cheap fares in 1997 and also sold my car.

"However, in October the prices for early services were changed and it would have cost me £4,000 a year to travel instead of £1,000.

"It seems Virgin were getting people to use their trains and then once aboard decided to try and take advantage by raising the price."

She added: "I have now got to decide whether to buy another car and if I do I will never use public transport again."

Virgin Trains spokesman Dennis Lovett

said too many people were using the value ticket and it was taken off early morning trains because of demand.

The issue of price is always balanced between supply and demand, but this is a perfect example of why the Government's plans to 'encourage' us to use public transport are fundamentally flawed. Our public transport system can't cope, so when more people use the system than the operator would like, they just raise the prices. And don't forget that more than ten times as much is spent on public transport subsidies each year than on road maintenance — over £7billion against just over £1/2billion!

Nowhere to run...

A local newspaper recently reported how a traffic campaign launched by a House of Commons front bencher could see Crewkerne's "lorry nightmare" come to an end. What they don't seem to have realised is that the measures suggested aren't going to solve any problems.

They confidently assert that the stream of lorries rumbling through Misterton and Crewkerne from Dorchester on the A356 could be cut off for good, after the announcement that a Tory MP is to seek multi-million pound funding for anti-lorry measures on the road.

West Dorset MP Oliver Letwin has responded to pleas from his constituency to stem the tide of heavy traffic passing their homes. The full length of the road will be subject to the scrutiny of a group Mr Letwin is in the process of setting up.

Dubbed *Three Brains Letwin* he had been an adviser to Margaret Thatcher. Once a director of one of the UK's largest financial firms, Rothschilds, he currently oversees the party's treasury policy.

He has recruited two traffic experts to help

write a report on the dire traffic situation. The report will then be presented to the region's highest planning authority, the South West Regional Planning Conference, in an attempt to get a one-off multi-million pound investment into schemes to deter lorries from using the road.

"The group's aim will be to establish what will help and how much it will cost," said Mr Letwin. "It will be a serious proposal. There is a common interest all along the road, traffic calming anywhere will help everyone and, by taking the road as a whole, it is easier to justify spending lots of money on clear overall ideas."

Misterton Parish Council chairman Jeff White was enthusiastic about the plans. "Lorries are the single biggest problem we have in the village, but there is not much a village can do about it on its own. I should say we are very interested in taking this on," he said.

What a shame that even with three brains, Letwin is unable to see that by simply making life difficult for road users, the problem won't go away. How can it when no alternative is being offered?

Rail betrayal

Only 41% of passengers think the railways represent good value for money, according to a comprehensive survey for the Government's Shadow Strategic Rail Authority.

Widespread discontent with train cleanliness, overcrowding, seat comfort, station facilities and lack of information about delays were uncovered by the research, based on the views of almost 20,000 customers.

Mike Grant, the authority's chief executive, said he was concerned that the proportion of passengers seeing rail as good value was as low as 41% nationally and barely 30% in the commuter heartlands of the South East. He said the issue was "something we have to deal with", though he said there were no plans to introduce stricter regulation of fares or plans to increase subsidies.

The authority, which should be established on a full legal basis by the summer, intends to hold similar passenger surveys every six months. It said it would use the results to underpin the commitments to be required of train operators in the forthcoming round of franchise replacement negotiations.

Welcome to the 21st century

It didn't take a genius to work out that if you were relying on public transport over the New Year period you were courting disaster.

Suffolk was a bus-free zone on New Year's Day and thousands of villagers around Ipswich were without access to services for all four days of the New Year holiday.

As John Prescott unveiled his 10-year, £80 billion vision* for transport designed to wean motorists away from their cars, Suffolk County Council confirmed it had no money to subsidise holiday services.

Suffolkbus decided not to operate any services between December 31st and January 3rd.

Geoff Butterwick, the county council's transport officer, said

operators had taken a commercial decision not to run services. "This year New Year's Eve is a Bank Holiday, and there will be very few people going to work," he said. "Since deregulation, bus operators have not been under an obligation to operate services over Bank Holidays. The county council has not got the money to subsidise the routes — the government knew a Millennium was coming but did not see fit to give us any extra cash to support public transport over the period."

There are typically 20,000 cold-related deaths over a mild winter and 40,000 over a severe winter. Last year 3421 people were killed on the UK's roads...

The newspapers were full of letters in the first few days of the new year, written by angry members of the public who had chosen to venture into London on New Year's eve, reliant on public transport.

One particular family had a thoroughly miserable time trying

to get out of London. They went to three railway stations, all of which were closed. It was felt that the best way of controlling the crowds was to close the stations, thus preventing anyone from getting crushed. The few buses that ran were dangerously overcrowded, and there was no form of communication at any of the closed stations suggesting what anyone could do to get to their destination. There wasn't even anyone around who knew what was going on. How thoroughly British.

*The much-trumpeted 10-year plan involving the expenditure of £80bn is actually no increase on current levels — in real terms it's actually less. Currently around £8bn is spent each year on transport, so £80bn over 10 years isn't much of an increase!

No bull

Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott scooped a booby prize in a contest rewarding people for their use of plain English. Mr Prescott will be awarded a Golden Bull award at the 20th annual Plain English Campaign ceremony for part of a Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions consultation paper judged to be "prime gobbledygook".

Mr Prescott's Golden Bull follows the issuing of a consultation paper on "the implementation of the IPPC Directive".

The paper reads: "In the application by virtue of this paragraph of subparagraphs (4) and (6) to (10) of paragraph 3 to an application or proposed variation.

"(a) the notice served under subparagraph (2) of this paragraph shall be treated as the notification required by sub-paragraph (4) (a) of paragraph 3.

"(b) The reference in sub-paragraph (6) of paragraph 3 to the day on which the notification under sub-paragraph (4) (a) of paragraph 3 is made shall be treated as reference to the day on which the notice served under sub-paragraph (2) of this paragraph is given."

Brian Sealy-Clarke

The first email of the new year for ABD committee members was the very sad news that one of the ABD's longest-standing members died on 23rd December. Brian Sealy-Clarke put in a lot of time for the cause, particularly at Goodwood, where the organisation had a stand each year at the Festival of Speed.

There was a Memorial Service for Brian on 12th January, attended by Stephen Dommert and Susan Newby-Robson. Brian left his body to medical research, and if you would like to make a donation to medical research this would be most appropriate.

£5 million to spare

The Government have handed West Midlands councils £5 million to sell the idea of a workplace parking tax for motorists.

Birmingham, Sandwell, Wolverhampton, Dudley and Walsall councils will use the money to mount a huge public relations and research campaign to promote the £250-a-year "poll tax on wheels".

They see the new tax as the only way to finance a world-class public transport system for the West Midlands, although many business leaders and Solihull and Coventry councils are bitterly opposed to the levy.

The cash is nearly a third of a special £18 million national pot for cities on the fast-track to imposing the drive to work taxes.

It comes after Birmingham leader Albert Bore saw ministers last month to insist that any charge should be prefaced by a £400

million spending campaign on public transport improvements in the city to convince motorists that it would be worth paying.

But there was little sign of any extra cash as the Government announced that the £91 million West Midlands Council wanted to invest in public transport this year would actually be slashed by more than half to only £44 million.

Do you fancy a challenge? If you do you could apply for the job of making Prescott appear popular — he's after a new spin-doctor. Up to £100,000 is on offer for the right person, beating Prescott's £94,000 annual salary.

Big projects axed from the package are an International Station for the Convention Centre and a huge transport interchange to service the Birmingham International train station-Airport-NEC complex.

The additional £5 million windfall for work on the parking tax is seen by Ministers as giving the green light to start the experiment in 2004 in Birmingham and surrounding areas.

City transport director David Pywell said a lot of expensive work would be needed to prepare for the introduction of the parking tax, which could be applied to hospitals, sports clubs, schools and colleges as well as businesses.

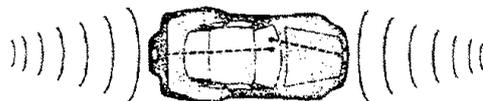
He said: "We would need to carry out research on how it would affect businesses and which sections of the community should be exempt. It is not the sort of thing you can do in five minutes."

A DETR spokeswoman said: "We want to give councils like those in the West Midlands who have expressed in interest in developing work place charging a kick start.

"The level of further funding that would be needed will be decided when we start talking to the councils about their plans in February."

Transport Minister Keith Hill said: "In the West Midlands, five of the local authorities are succeeding in developing the sort of local consensus on parking charges we would like to see."

Radar defence systems



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news briefs

Road Safety Week 2000

Brake have announced details of their 2000 Road Safety Week. Part of a European-wide initiative, this year's Road Safety Week will be held on 1-7 May and include the following events:

A national Road Safety Week launch will be held on Friday 28th April in London.

Ten UK police forces will conduct driver surveys on topics such as speeding, driver tiredness and seat belt wearing.

You can call Brake on 01306 741 113 to find out more or write to Brake at PO Box 272, Dorking, Surrey, RH4 4FR.

Speed kills?

Cornwall's road safety unit has claimed that during 1998, 28% of fatal accidents were caused by excessive speed for the conditions, and 2% by exceeding the speed limit. Presumably the 2% are included in the 28%. The figures for non-fatal accidents are 38% and zero!

In Hertfordshire, 21% of accidents were caused by a driver misjudging the speed or distance of another vehicle; 15% through motorists driving too close to other vehicles; 14% were caused by slippery road conditions, and 13% happened because drivers were going too fast for the road conditions — even though they had stayed within the speed limit.

OTR — Feedback needed

The new-style *On The Road* has been generally well received. If you would like it to stay as it is, or you'd like to see some changes, please let us know. Is there too much information or not enough? Should the information in it be different, and if so, how? Due to printing costs being high it may have to be slimmed down slightly anyway — what are your thoughts on this?

Only in America...

Nissan has produced what they claim to be the cleanest petrol-powered car ever. The Sentra Clean Air is so clean that if the car is driven 20 miles in a day it will produce fewer hydrocarbon emissions than a normal new car that hadn't been used at all.

The key to its cleanliness is the elimination of fuel vapour escaping, as well as emissions reduction technology. The radiator is coated to convert ozone into oxygen, cleaning the air as the car is driven. There are no plans to sell the car in this country, as it is currently available only in California.

Lesley Harvey was caught speeding five times in two weeks by the same speed camera — because she didn't know what the flash was. She was photographed twice on the same day. Harvey received 18 penalty points and a six-month driving ban after admitting six speeding offences, one on a different stretch of road. She was fined £120.

Pedestrian crash horror

According to the Pedestrians' Association many pedestrians are suffering injuries similar to those sustained in a car crash. Poor quality paving is leading to people falling over and suffering horrific injuries — see web-sites to visit on page 12.

You've been tangoed

Following an increase in parking charges in Hanley, 7,000 people have applied for orange badges. At £20 per medical to confirm eligibility, this has resulted in a £40,000 overspend by the Health Authority, as they had budgeted for only 5,000 applications. NHS officials believe this is a direct result of the increase in parking charges.

Police talk sense shock!

Police in Preston are worried about the number of pedestrians being injured on roads in the town. So far this year, five people have been killed, with 49 seriously injured and more than 70 others have suffered more minor injuries.

Inspector Andrew Baxter said: "Statistics reveal that many of these collisions could have been avoided if the pedestrians themselves had taken more care when crossing the road. In most of these cases, the drivers could not be blamed. Many of those injured were under the influence of alcohol."

Just the ticket

145 drivers who were fined for speeding in Northumberland have had their money refunded after it was discovered that the road was not adequately signposted.

Death taxes

The old saying goes that only two things in life are certain — death and taxes. ABD member Keith Walker noticed recently that the current homicide rate is around 800 a year. The suicide rate is around 6000 a year. Combine the two and you are near to double the number of road deaths. How long until death taxes are levied to pay for the cost to society of suicides?!

Suffolkation — the sequel

20mph speed limits are likely to be introduced in more Suffolk villages.

Highways chiefs are poised to enforce the measures after 48 people were killed in Suffolk road accidents last year, compared with just 23 in 1998.

West Suffolk coroner Bill Walrond, an outspoken critic of the widespread 30mph village zones, said: "It could be counter-productive. An increase in fatalities in Suffolk came after they introduced a load of reduced speed limits. Some of these limits are thoroughly justified, but they cannot just apply them everywhere because they have worked in some places."

With this issue of *On The Road* you should have two car stickers — one to go inside your car window and one to go on the bumper. If you would like to order any more please do so from Susan Newby-Robson, whose contact details are below.

national contacts

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ignition

One has to ask what the point is in touting Gus MacDonald as the new Transport Supremo when John Prescott has gone on record repeatedly claiming that he is still in charge.

If MacDonald can't make any decisions without Lardy 2 Jags' say-so, it's patently obvious that the latter has decided to hedge his bets and take the credit for anything that he can, while denying any responsibility for any moves that might prove unpopular.

With very little of substance having been promised since the changes, it's unlikely that Prescott is going to be taking much credit for anything in the foreseeable future. Drivers may be waking up to the fact that they are under attack from all sides, but there's a very long way to go before we can claim to have a sense of security — false or otherwise.

If any proof were needed that we're far from home and dry comes Prescott's announcement that GPS speed limiters are seriously being considered. See page 1 and the letters pages for more on this.

Many of the ABD's new members have joined because they are passionate about their cars — they see them as more than just a means

of getting from A to B. As members of one-make clubs, many have suggested the ABD tries to strike up some sort of relationship with these organisations, in an attempt to obtain some publicity and support from their members.

At the end of 1998, 200 such clubs were contacted by the ABD, a few of whom were very enthusiastic about informing their members of our existence. The majority didn't wish to support us in any way. If you can ask the editor of your club magazine to tell his members about the existence of the ABD, it may just be enough to make the difference — after all, clubs are there to reflect their members' views. Next month's OTR will have more on how you can help.

Last summer the ABD started recruiting regional representatives, so members and potential members could contact somebody who might know about issues local to them.

If your area isn't represented, please think about offering some help. The ABD would like to cover each part of the country — the more people who help (even if it's in a very small way) the more effective we can be.

As a regional representative you don't need to speak to the media if you don't want to — we have trained spokespeople for that. You don't even need to spend your weekends distributing leaflets — if you're prepared to speak to potential members about the reasons why they should be supporting the ABD that's enough.

Although we have a long way to go, the ABD is making progress. Thanks to our professionalism, what is often forgotten is that

we are run 100% on a voluntary basis. Our sole source of income is from our members' subscriptions, and nobody who works for the ABD is paid for their work.

What also must be remembered is that everybody who volunteers to give the ABD their time also has a full-time job and (in most cases) a family as well. It doesn't happen often, but occasionally we get complaints that a letter or an email from an ABD member goes unanswered. With a finite number of hours available each week it sometimes isn't possible to write as many letters as we would like — I know from experience that a busy evening (after a day's work) might entail 18 emails having to be replied to. And standard replies are in the main not practicable.

When there is a choice between replying to a non-member's request for information about the ABD and acknowledging some press cuttings sent by a member we will endeavour to respond to both, but occasionally have to go for the former only.

As with most things in life, the more resources that are put into something, the better the result. So if you would like to get involved in helping the organisation to move forward, please do offer to help.

Our web-site is one of the ways people find out about us. If you could contribute to the development of the web-site, particularly if you have skills in database integration, Steve Dommett would love to hear from you. His email address is 100671.502@compuserve.com

Fund raising and sponsorship are something that we need to spend more time on. If you would like an input into this area please get in touch with me. With more money we can build ourselves a higher profile and give drivers the voice they deserve.

Chris Medd

On The Road February 2000 — Page 5

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Join in the ABD-Action

Members will be aware that the ABD has for some time operated a mailing list called *abdml* operating through *Onelist* on the internet. Some members have joined this list but then found themselves unable to deal with the volume of messages received, and consequently unsubscribed from the list. We are also aware of a large number of members with e-mail addresses who have never joined the list, probably for a similar reason.

This compromises our ability to utilise e-mail to quickly contact as many members as possible, at virtually no cost. To overcome this problem we have set up a new mailing list called *abd-action* which will be restricted to time-critical and important items only. We are also sending out copies of our press releases to our members — the number typically being a couple each week. This way you know what's going on and you also know the facts on the current issues.

In order to keep the volume of messages low, members cannot post to the list, only certain committee members may do so. The intention is that the message volume will be no more than one message a day — most days there will be none at all. There is no discussion at all — the facility is there to inform ABD members as quickly as possible.

We hope that all members with e-mail will join this new list so that urgent requests for action can be distributed as quickly as possible. Nothing posted to ABD Action will be posted to *abdml*, or vice versa.

A recent example was an opportunity for members to respond to Surrey County Council's consultation on speed limits in the county. The ABD sent a fact sheet to these members, allowing them to spend a few minutes composing a letter. It is only by taking such opportunities that we can make a real difference. This is how our opposition have succeeded — they have mobilised their members to tackle issues at a local level.

Members without e-mail can be assured that *On The Road* will continue to keep them up to date, but you will appreciate that this can only be on a monthly basis, rather than the potential daily update facilitated by e-mail.

If you would like to join the list, please send an e-mail to abd-action-owner@onelist.com stating your full name and ABD membership number — you'll receive any messages straight away.

A bad day for T2000

By Nigel Humphries

I attended the Road Safety Strategy seminar recently, at the invitation of the DETR and in the presence of Road Safety Minister Lord Whitty.

This was a high level event, with the top people from various interest groups present. It comprised a series of presentations by Roger Peal, head of DETR road safety, about the structure of future road safety strategy.

This was intended to be a discussion meeting, the outcome of which was to shape a future consultation paper, so it was crucial that the ABD were involved.

A handout was produced for each delegate with draft notes on:

- ⌘ Targets for casualty reduction
- ⌘ Safer speeds on safer roads (interesting title but still headed by the one third fallacy)
- ⌘ Safer vehicles
- ⌘ Safer Drivers
- ⌘ Impairment
- ⌘ Protecting Children
- ⌘ Safety for Cyclists, Pedestrians and Horseriders
- ⌘ Motorcycle safety and training
- ⌘ Local Transport Plans
- ⌘ Enforcement

At each stage there was an opportunity for open discussion after a short presentation. These presentations were very high-level, designed to provoke discussion rather than prescribe policies.

Roger Peal impressed me greatly. He spoke with knowledge, open mindedness and good humour (largely unappreciated by certain sections of the audience) and showed considerable cynicism towards both statistics and established positions. I was reminded of Mrs Thatcher's statement after her first meeting with Gorbachev: "Here is a man I can do business with", after previously describing the regime as an evil empire!

He said some pretty amazing things like "I'm not at all sure that trying to make people drive at a speed that we want them to and they don't is the right way to go forward." He said things we would not agree with, as well, of course.

Lord Whitty also enhanced his reputation as a reasonable person who listens and considers all arguments carefully before making a decision. The fact he was there for the full two hours

instead of simply making a keynote speech and departing is a measure of the importance of this event.

The first presentation was on targets, and the first person to put her hand up and speak was Lynn Sloman of Transport 2000. She instantly started spouting about speed reduction, lambasting the government for not showing the courage to really tackle speeds and to reduce them, citing examples of Holland reducing all urban speeds to 20mph by 2006.

After a few other speeches, I managed to get in and say how unfortunate it was that some people could only refer to targets in the context of reducing speeds whereas the objective was to reduce casualties (Sloman had not mentioned casualties once in her spiel). Since this kind of thinking had been in the ascendancy, I continued, deaths, which had fallen 25% in the first six years of the decade 1987-1997, had only fallen 5% in the last four years. In fact, the only area where significant progress had been made that could not be placed at the door of better passive vehicle safety was in the area of motorcycling, which had pursued a training based strategy (picking up on something from the presentation).

After this, there were many good contributions from the driver training lobby.

Graham Fryer of the DIA spoke of the many inappropriate limits, like an A-road in Surrey which went from 30 to 20 and back eight times in a few miles, and that the limit should be 40 all the way through, which was the speed everyone did, anyway.

There was much else in the same vein, with Andrew Howard of the AA warning of a backlash from drivers, quoting his research that showed the 90% support for cameras falling to 50% when the police got the money. He even qualified this by saying if you don't believe the 90%, where does that leave the 50%?

I did not feel the need to intervene at this point, so good were the points being made by others. It was only when we got to the section on safer drivers that another opportunity presented itself. Here, they were on about the driving test and the propensity of new drivers to be involved in accidents.

A move from somebody to get the minimum age for driving raised on these grounds had already been nipped in the bud by somebody else who said (and was obviously regarded as

"Lynn Sloman of Transport 2000 started spouting about speed reduction, lambasting the government for not showing the courage to really tackle speeds and to reduce them, citing examples of Holland reducing all urban speeds to 20mph by 2006"

"Some people could only refer to targets in the context of reducing speeds whereas the objective was to reduce casualties — Sloman hadn't mentioned casualties once in her spiel"

campaigning

authoritative on this) that new mature drivers were only marginally better than 17 year olds. I spoke up that the basic problem with the driving test was that people — rightly or wrongly — believed that one only learned to drive after the test, and that the issue of bad speed limits was fundamental to this. Even if people were compelled to obey, they could not be compelled to agree with travelling at 40mph on a three-lane dual carriageway with crash barriers and graded junctions, and that such things brought all road safety policy into disrepute. I continued to stress how the issue of inappropriate speed limits in particular and speed reduction policy in general worked in direct opposition to driving standards, saying that I could go on all day about this but that I had prepared a handout instead (smile from Lord Whitty).

On the train that morning, I had seen a headline describing a London Borough Highways Director as enjoying making drivers' lives hell. I produced this and asked how this individual was likely to respond to the delegated powers to set speed limits — on a responsible safety related basis or as another tool in his armoury of driving misery?

My point was illustrated by reference to a large industrial plant with a blanket 20mph limit which I happen to frequent. One could not properly observe all the hazards and drive safely if forced by heavy enforcement to ensure one did not exceed 20mph anywhere. Where would horseriders be if drivers, instead of passing them at 5mph, did the 40mph that was being suggested by some for country road limits?

I also managed to get in a speech about blood alcohol limits (details below) and a strong condemnation of speed limiters, which had also been mentioned, quoting Leeds University research which showed how they increased accidents, and how I personally found cruise control dangerous.

Blood alcohol limits would have stayed off my agenda, despite Whitty saying there would be a decision in the autumn, had it not been for a speech by the so called Campaign Against Drinking and Driving, who should perhaps be renamed the Campaign for the Criminalisation of Non-Drink Drivers the Morning After. This contained some absurd figures claiming that only a third of drink drive deaths were reported because of the current limit.

I couldn't let this go, and quoted the consultation paper from the government which showed that 2% of drivers had 50-80mg on random sampling with a similar proportion of both dead drivers and injured drivers showing BACs in that range. There was therefore evidence built in to the consultation paper itself that there was nothing to be gained by cutting the limit and that all it would

"I had seen a headline describing a London Borough Highways Director as enjoying making drivers' lives hell. How is he likely to respond to the delegated powers to set speed limits — on a responsible safety related basis or as another tool in his armoury of driving misery?"

achieve would be to disincentivise the hard core from avoiding drink driving on the grounds that non-drink driving friends had been caught out by the new law.

At this point I heard a mutter behind, and invited comment. A woman said rubbish and I congratulated her with heavy sarcasm on her positive and uplifting contribution before continuing. This turned out to be Jean Breen, head of the ETSC, the euro equivalent of PACTS (Parliamentary Advisory Committee on Transport Safety) and Gifford's predecessor at PACTS! Afterwards, she asked if I enjoyed her barracking and seemed quite embarrassed.

That concluded my second and quite long enough interjection. I was supported on the blood alcohol issue by another speaker who added the other main argument against reducing blood alcohol limits — namely the issue of public acceptance of the current limit and the risk that lowering it would result in it becoming as unaccepted as speed limits.

The culmination of the day's events came when Lynn Sloman stood up to speak for the second time. It is worth reflecting on her strategy — get in first with a prepared speech and then get in nearly last with a summary style speech, delivered at a carefully measured time at the end, thus dominating the proceedings. However, it did not quite work for her this time.

She began by saying how disappointed she was with how the seminar had progressed. Now I was under the impression that it was the DETR's seminar, but how could I be so foolish? Of course, the meeting had been organised solely for the benefit of the great Lynn Sloman and her band of followers! In what other areas of life, she continued, would the deaths of 3600 a year be tolerated whilst the

government listened to the libertarian arguments and toleration of breaking the law which she had heard that day, when what was needed was drastic action in place of talk of training and other such nonsense. A bit rich, coming from somebody whose only interest in road safety is how it can be used to pursue her political anti-car agenda! I couldn't say this, of course, but I really didn't think I needed to state the obvious!

A couple of other speakers then followed her lead, one of whom, a Road Danger Reduction Forum representative in shorts, said that the Government should get on with the job of dealing with drivers and to stop listening to the views of extremists. The British Drivers' Association and their ilk only existed because the Government was willing to listen to them. Truly wonderful — I grinned widely and kept my silence. It is important to quit whilst ahead at these events, and I was delighted by this — these people were losing it and hurling insults. A sure sign they were losing the argument.

I didn't need to speak — the Freight Transport Association representative stood up and said that

"One of the main arguments against reducing Blood Alcohol limits is the issue of public acceptance of the current limit, and the risk that lowering it would result in it becoming as unaccepted as speed limits"

Sloperon had misrepresented the discussion by describing it as libertarian — safety spending needed to be carefully targeted on what was effective and that was what the talk had been about.

Finally, Whitty invited contributions from those who had not spoken, with Ben Plowden of the Pedestrians Association being one. This man's basic position is that pedestrians should be able to saunter across the road wherever and whenever they please without paying proper attention and that any burden of responsibility for consequent collisions should fall on the driver. After all, HGVs kill pedestrians, not the other way round, don't they? Go for it, Ben!

The end result was that the opposition came out of this seminar looking marginalised and discredited (maybe wishful thinking on my part but I don't think so) and we made very substantial progress.

The next step is to write to Roger Peal and arrange a meeting, with Whitty as well if possible. We must also rethink our language and strategy — we are now an organisation which is winning the argument.

campaigning

Can we pay more please?

Malcolm Heymer recently attended a seminar organised by the Adam Smith Institute on the subject *Making urban congestion charging work*. Whilst the whole concept of congestion charging is obviously anathema to the ABD, the presentations by the professional speakers were analytical and rational — this was not a Transport 2000/FoE propaganda event. Amongst the points raised were:

⌘ Road users must see that they are getting a clear service for the money, or reduced car taxes elsewhere, if charging is to be accepted

⌘ Better public transport services and cycling/walking facilities must be in place up front (they also looked at the way in which this could be financed, through the money markets).

Unfortunately, of course, any road user charging schemes will be taken forward by local authorities, which have no say in national taxation, so the trade off between charges and lower motoring taxes is not going to materialise.

In addition to the professionals, there was a guest speaker — none other than Ken Livingstone. For someone who is seen as 'loony left', he came over as quite pragmatic. He is also very direct, which is refreshing in a politician. He made some very specific commitments about congestion charging in the event of him becoming Mayor. He will introduce congestion charging in central London (the area between Park Lane and the City, Euston Road and the Thames), with a £5 per day charge Monday to Friday. This will come into effect in August 2001, initially as a paper-based permit system.

When challenged about how public transport could be improved in such a short time scale, he said it would have to be through better bus services — more bus lanes, stricter enforcement, better information, conductors back on buses (security). He claims that the business community in London supports congestion charging, otherwise he would not attempt to introduce it. He also said that the business community is totally against workplace parking charges, so he has no intention of trying to introduce them — he reckons that he will have enough opposition to congestion charging (correct!) and he doesn't want to have to fight on two fronts. Besides, if congestion charging works, why bother with parking charges? He is also of the opinion that congestion charging is only applicable to cities and not in suburban or rural areas.

His views are less radical than I had expected and do not go as far as many of the tree huggers would like. It will be interesting to see whether other local authorities will be brave enough (or stupid enough) to press ahead with workplace parking charges if even 'Red Ken' sees them as unworkable. I think we can look forward to more public disagreements between him and J2J — he clearly despises Prescott.

Interesting times ahead!

Going through the motions

By Brian Gregory

I recently attended the Transport in the New Millennium Symposium, held at the Royal College of Arts in London.

There were various debates taking place, most of which I managed to attend (some were running concurrently with others).

Motion one

"The car was once portrayed as a liberatory mode of transport. Nowadays it is seen as the cause of pollution, community fragmentation and ill-health. Guilty or not guilty?"

Speakers:

Ian MacAllister, Ford (GB)

Steven Bayley, Curator, Moving Objects

Terence Bendickson, President, Pedestrians' Association

Keith Harper, Guardian Transport Editor

Chair: Austin Williams, Director, Transport Research Group

MacAllister opened with a stout defence of the private car, saying how it represents freedom, mobility, opportunity and leisure, as well as it being an essential economic engine.

The emissions problem has more or less been solved in that one 1970s Escort emits as much as 62 modern Focuses. The majority of emissions in this country are emitted by around 10% of the vehicles in it. MacAllister quoted the ABD's figures on CO2 emissions, explaining that road transport accounts for a mere 0.6% of total annual global emissions. He continued by saying that the motor industry is committed to a 25% reduction on current levels by 2008 through more efficient engines — LPG (Liquid Petroleum Gas), CNG (Compressed Natural Gas), H2 (hydrogen) & eventually methanol fuel-cell technology. MacAllister made the crucial point, which is frequently overlooked, that electric vehicles merely export emissions — they do not solve the emissions problem.

During the subsequent question and answer session I made the point that our Government annually extracts more than enough revenue from motorists to revamp the transport infrastructure, but the will to do it simply is not there. The Government doesn't want — and isn't interested in — solutions to these 'problems' as it is committed to using environment, congestion, safety and pollution as excuses for fleecing road users. MacAllister admitted there were far too many sticks used on motorists and virtually no carrots!

Harper took the typical leftie 'bash the

multi-car owning professional-class' stance. He claimed that road charging is essential and will come (not if we can help it!), and that people need to be coerced into owning fewer vehicles, and also to use them less.

He continued that the company car needs to be abolished. In response to his session at question and answer time, I pointed out that we already had excessive road charging at the fuel pump — 80% of people are opposed to it. I also pointed out that there isn't a real problem outside our major towns and cities and that current traffic projections make no allowances for changing working practices and travel patterns through home- & tele-working, nor is the Government actively encouraging this. What problems there are, arise from a history of lack of infrastructure investment in the UK, and that (regarding multi-vehicle ownership) one driver can only drive one car at a time — and there is a finite number of available drivers. Regarding company cars, his suggestion would lead me to drive a five-year old Audi Quattro in preference to a one-year old Vectra, staunching the flow of comparatively new pre-owned cars, slowing the renewal of the vehicle pool and emissions reductions.

Bayley defended the motor vehicle on aesthetic grounds, which was of peripheral importance in policy-framing terms.

Bendickson alleged walking is the second most important form of transport — and in cities it is the primary one. He admitted there was no prospect of un-inventing the car, but he doesn't like the way cars are exporting jobs out of cities to semi-rural — or at least less urbanised — areas. He admitted there are problems with public transport, but then went into a litany against the NVH, intimidation and of course danger caused by 'speeding' vehicles. The Paddington rail crash was a very good

analogy to show the blinkered thinking behind this approach. I had got so

"The Government doesn't want — and isn't interested in — solutions to our transport problems as it is committed to using environment, congestion, safety and pollution as excuses for fleecing road users"

many points in regarding the previous speakers that I didn't get to answer Bendickson's points. (Perhaps by this point the speakers had cottoned on to the fact that many of their arguments didn't stand up to scrutiny — and Brian was doing a very good job of scrutinising them! — ed)

Motion two

"Has the car had a positive or negative effect on urban development? In the debate about globalism versus regionalism, should we aspire to travel further or to travel less?"

campaigning

Speakers:

Martin Pawley, Author *Terminal Architecture*
Jonathan Meades, Journalist/ Broadcaster
Helen Caroline Jones, co-curator,
Architecture & Democracy

Ken Worpole, Senior Associate, Comedia
& Demos

Chair: Austin Williams, Transport
Research Group

Meades opened this review of the currently perceived conflict between the car and the human-built environment.

He suggested there is currently an over-reaction to urban problems and that car-hating has become a faith.

Pedestrianisation "is like God and is a wonderfully ornate and complex fiction". Executive control is being exercised in an authoritarian fashion with social control as the objective.

Meades' view is that these trends fly in the face of the natural evolution of society — attempts to enforce centripetal urban development are doomed in a culture developing centrifugally under the influence of mass communication technologies.

Worpole majored on his perception of the divisiveness of the car's land area needs. He cited the proposed Great Newcastle Park development on Newcastle upon Tyne town moor (a large area of common land used for funfairs etc). Worpole is opposed to this as the council has demolished 3000 houses with another 8000 unoccupied — it's just that they are in areas where prospective occupiers don't want to live!

He castigated the Redburn plan (New Jersey) where isolated, self-contained housing estates are built with no throughways and therefore only used by locals. He noted that this type of development is now banned by the DETR. He then turned his ire (tinged with bewilderment) on the many households which spend more on their cars than their houses. A house is just a place to live; a car can be an object of desire! But he couldn't see that.

Jones opened with a discourse on the development of filling station architecture; which, while of curiosity value, added little to the proceedings.

Pawley examined the flawed reasoning underlying anti-car philosophies. The enemy used depersonalisation. Speaking of car dependency is equivalent to car denunciation and ignores the car's many advantages. We are not dependent on cars, we are liberated by them. There is no reason why a car compatibility and a humane environment have to be mutually exclusive. He made the following points/ quotes:

"The car is different from your car or my

car."

"Unless they put speed bumps the whole length of the M4, it's the way I'll be getting home tonight"

"The enemy believes that: "Machine made objects are inhumane" — William Rodgers

"Cars are charged with being antithetical to cities. Actually they rescue people from them" (Hear! Hear!).

"If the city is a scorpion then cars are the ants"

The mania for traffic calming arises from the fact that most cities pre-date cars. The impact of the

car on the city has always been weaker than the impact of the city on the car. Ever since the Keynesian collapse of the early 60s the car has been on the defensive.

No crash programme can match the speed of political rhetoric.

Mondeo Man wants urban convenience transported to the country; the preferred location of his home.

He noted the dichotomy between paying farmers to get out of farming then trying to confine all new housebuilding in brownfield city centre locations. This is at odds with the expected trends in the 21st Century. He also believed that the centrifugal force of society would overcome centripetal pull — urban population densities should be reduced to the levels that enable the local infrastructure to cope.

Motion three

"CCTV, Gatsos, roadside emissions tests, random breathalysers, drug-test cordons, tyrecheck road blocks. Sensible precautions or unwarranted intrusion?"

Speakers:

Brian Gregory, ABD Chairman

Ralph Harrington, Institute of Railway Studies

Ian Mutch, Motorcycle Action Group

John Stewart, Chairman, Roadpeace

Chair: James Heartfield, Reviews Editor, LM Magazine

This rapidly devolved into a standoff on the issue of speed. Stewart of Roadpeace admitted they were mainly concerned with high-risk environments, but also they wanted lower speeds to encourage walking, cycling and horse-riding and also to make them safer. Has anyone actually tried to determine just how many people are actually going to be encouraged to walk, cycle or horse-ride by such measures? Experience suggests that people will dig their heels in and continue as before rather than be forced

into doing something they don't want to do.

Brian debunked this nonsense by reference to TRL323, assisted by Mutch and Trevor Magner of the BMF. He also showed some examples of the worst abuses of speed camera technology, such as the A68 on the Scottish Borders and the A45 in the Midlands. Thanks are due to Brian Hunter and Chris Ward who provided pictures for these. Brian continued by demonstrating the inappropriate use of cameras at Elkesley on the A1 dual carriageway near Worksop. At this site speed cameras are used where what is really needed is a graded roundabout with sliproads.

One audience member made the rather valid point (which is applicable in most cases!) that we are human. As such we are imperfect and make mistakes, so it's totally unrealistic to expect that we should not continue to do so.

Professor Mayer ('The Imp') Hillman spouted the usual load of anti-car drivel, just as everybody predicted he would do. We should make him a compulsory attendee of every conference, as he personifies anti-car sentiment. He wanted the driver held responsible for every pedestrian road accident! He cited the Walkington example, where an unsupervised educationally subnormal child was killed after being allowed to ride out of a garden and onto the main road through the village where they lived. The child went straight under the trailer of an articulated lorry doing all of 11mph.

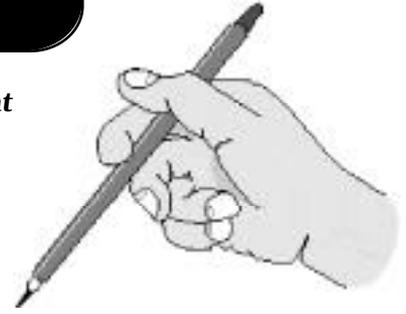
As we have come to expect from Hillman, he laid the blame for all such incidents at the door of the driver. What he failed to even start to address was that road user education is needed — and that includes the guardians of those insufficiently responsible to look after themselves. He didn't even suggest that any road user has a responsibility to any other road user — only drivers should accept responsibility for anything, as they are the ones least vulnerable.

The day's discussions showed that people are waking up to the fact that drivers are under fire. Although there were those who were anti-car in the extreme, their arguments were easily knocked down thanks to the fact that the other side of the argument is becoming increasingly well known. There's still a long way to go before we can feel less threatened, but there is a lot of strong feeling on the motorist's side, which makes a pleasant change!

"There's currently an over-reaction to urban problems and car-hating has become a faith. Pedestrianisation is like God and is a wonderfully ornate and complex fiction".

"We are human. As such we are imperfect and make mistakes, so it's totally unrealistic to expect that we should not continue to do so"

letters



If you would like to write to OTR please address your letter to Chris Medd at PO Box 2228, Kenley, Surrey CR8 5ZT or email chrismedd75@yahoo.co.uk

I am somewhat heartened by Chris Ward's letter in Issue 31 of *On The Road* in which he makes the assumption that, because someone claims to be 'an advanced driver', he or she is a member of the Institute of Advanced Motorists.

This suggests that, despite an obvious and considerable lack of knowledge of Advanced Driving organisations he is at least aware of their existence, or rather that of the IAM. He may be surprised to learn that as well as the IAM there is also an Advanced Drivers Association under the aegis of RoSPA.

I wonder what his opinions of the latter organisation would be if he knew that the person with whom he takes issue were a member rather than of the IAM. Alternatively it could be that they held a Police advanced driving qualification.

Full membership of each of these organisations is obtained only by meeting a single requirement, that of passing a very thorough advanced driving test. One is not "allowed" to become a member, one earns it by demonstration of good driving skills and general 'road knowledge' to a fully qualified police or ex-police examiner.

No other requirement enters into the matter - political affiliation, beliefs, opinions on any subject, race, creed or you-name-it.

I am afraid that Mr Ward would do well to ensure that he obtains all pertinent facts before making implied criticisms of advanced driving organisations.

Having said that I am absolutely certain that if he were to accept that he could drive better (and we can all do that if we are honest), apply for membership of either of the above voluntary organisations, or even pay for advanced driving lessons, he would become more aware of, and capable of making better informed comments on, the overall situation on our roads and the many matters of contentious legislation with which the ABD are attempting to deal.

Whilst being a full member of both of the above organisations, for one of which I have been working voluntarily for an average of some two to three hours a week for several years, I must stress that the above are entirely my personal opinions and are in no way put on behalf of either of them.

Bryan Barton

Chris Ward (*OTR* January 2000) raised two issues upon which I should like to comment. There would appear to be something lacking about an IAM test that admitted membership to someone who does not comprehend that *police progressive driving* is its basis — a well-proven standard of craftsmanship that is the happy medium between driving that is too fast or too slow.

As for educating children in schools, surely that ought not to mean that ill-informed teachers should merely indoctrinate them with one side of a complicated argument. I reported the

following in the Norwich Evening News a year ago — it attracted no response from readers.

Driving along a straight C-class road I had reduced to 30mph in compliance with the law when, nearing a residential road on my left a boy cyclist of about 12 raced up towards his give-way line and was about to turn left in the same direction as I was driving when he belatedly saw my car and shouted "Roadhog!" I had already almost stopped my car.

Soon after I was riding my motorbike through a north Norfolk village when I stopped to permit children to alight from a school bus. All except one girl, in her early teens, crossed safely. She waited until I had moved off before stepping into the road in front of me, and actually smirked when I had to brake firmly to avoid her. Education? I think not!

Alan Dale

I was recently asked by how much bus companies are being subsidised. It's an interesting question as it goes beyond mere fuel subsidies.

Probably the biggest subsidy is from being VAT exempt (as all public transport is). That alone is probably worth £500m (based on a bus cost of 10p per passenger mile). On top of this they get a rebate on the diesel they use, which is about 35.7p a litre.

Net result is that a bus company pays about 28p a litre compared with a private motorist paying over 75p a litre.

But don't forget the massive damage caused by buses to the structure of the roads. This damage is proportional to the axle weight to the power of 4. From this a 10000kg (10 tonne) double decker bus does about 5000 times the damage of a 1200kg car.

All this to carry on average about nine passengers, which is less than six times as many as the average car.

Keith Walker

Recently discussing bus subsidies, I came across the following scenario, which goes some way towards explaining the fanaticism with which some people pursue the public transport ideal.

Imagine an elderly widow/disabled person living in a small village. As not enough people use the bus it isn't viable for the bus company (a profit-making organisation) to run a service, so the person is trapped/socially excluded.

The local authority is allowed to pay a bus company to run a service, but is limited with how much they can spend, based on passenger trips. This limit is about £2.

New contact details?

If your phone number or e-mail / postal addresses have changed since you joined the ABD, have you notified us? Please let us know straight away if your contact details have changed, as we sometimes need to get in touch with members.

Assume a 20 seater mini-link. The maximum subsidy/contract payment is £40, assuming a full bus. They possibly assume half full and pay £20.

The bus company then has to make its costs out of that £20 plus fares. Contracts pay better in urban than rural areas so that is where the bus companies go.

Rural authorities cannot pay more in order to compete, hence the reduction in rural services.

If the bus does not regularly carry more than ten passengers the subsidy is over £2 per trip and the subsidy, and therefore the service, stops.

If there are over ten passengers per trip but the company fails to make a profit at £20 plus fares, the service stops.

Therefore to end the isolation of this person there is a need to get passengers on the bus. By using your car you are condemning them to a life of social exclusion, especially if you do not offer her a lift and car share. Or so the argument goes.

While I'm at the keyboard, the Pedestrians' Association are running a nation-wide campaign to identify the best and worst places to cross the road, by asking for nominations for the riskiest spots. They are complaining about people being diverted 50 or 100 yards to find the nearest safe crossing place, being forced to walk through subways or over footbridges or being penned in the middle of busy roads like cattle.

They would like to hear about good crossing places where your local councils have slowed traffic or put in conveniently sited crossings where people actually want them. They say that over 1000 people a year are killed or seriously injured on pedestrian crossings, and as many again within 50 yards of one.

The phone number for nomination forms is 0171 820 1010.

This is a good time to highlight dangerous crossings on the exit from roundabouts and, the crossings that constantly hold up traffic while no one wants to cross.

Let's see if we can make this survey more representative than the CPRE one!

Dave Hammond

If you are an ABD member who is caught by a speed camera, perhaps you would like the opportunity to show the system up. If you decide to accept this suggestion, I must emphasise that you must not do anything that is going to miss the strictly enforced timetable for surrendering your licence and paying the fixed penalty. The last thing I would want to happen is to turn a fixed penalty into a magistrates' court case.

What I have in mind is that you should fully and promptly comply with any paperwork you receive, and simultaneously ask for a caution on

letters



**Opinions expressed in the letters pages are personal views and not necessarily those of the ABD
Letters may be shortened to allow the inclusion of as many contributions as possible**

the grounds that, assuming you have no criminal convictions — and I am sure you will not — had you been arrested for an offence of dishonesty which you are prepared to admit, a caution would have been the almost inevitable outcome. Of course, as we both know, there is one law for motorists and another one for criminals, so the applications would be refused.

You should then write and complain to your MP, pointing out the obvious inequity of the system. Once the ABD has a reasonable number of examples from around the country try and get one of the national newspapers like the Daily Mail interested, pointing out the anomaly of the system working in the way it does, when we have the safest roads and worst crime figures of any comparable country.

Brian Lawrence

Of all the reasons to prefer the private car over public mass transit, surely the most obvious is that of health. During the rush hour, passengers on buses and trains are jammed in like sardines with, on average, about a hundred others in every bus or train carriage. Everyone who has ever been in this situation will have had the unpleasant experience of sharing the carriage with at least one person in the throes of some vile respiratory infection, sniffing, snorting, sneezing, coughing and spluttering all over everyone else in the carriage — such a person presents an infectious hazard of the first order. The diseases one is likely to encounter do not stop at colds and flu — tuberculosis is no longer easily curable and is in fact now resistant to all known antibiotics — and there has been at least one case of Ebola virus in this country.

At least in the comfort of one's own vehicle one is safe from involuntary exposure to infection — but overcrowded public transport exposes everyone who uses it to needless risk of death by infection. It is only by a miracle that we haven't been decimated by some ghastly epidemic already. Every schoolchild knows of the terrible epidemics caused by the overcrowded living accommodation of the 19th century. Future epidemics will spread like wildfire through overcrowded public transport unless we allow more people to get to work by themselves in their own exclusive vehicles.

Keith Ackermann

I read that as part of the Millennium (sic) celebrations, five tons of fireworks were used in Edinburgh alone. The national figure must be several times that.

I didn't hear a single 'environmentalist' complain about this — it would be fascinating to compare the pollution caused by this extravaganza (wanted only by politicians?) with the emissions created by a road user going about their necessary business.

Brian Mooney

The blue poles seen by the side of the road are Trafficmaster passive flow monitoring devices. They take an infra-red image of the centre section of a sample of number plates (approximately 16 per 3 or 4 minutes), create a digital signature from that image and compare it with images obtained from devices further up the road. The devices are generally positioned around four miles apart. They can then work out the general speed of traffic over a section of road, identify where traffic is slowing to a rate that will cause delays, and broadcast that information to anyone who subscribes to their service and has the necessary equipment in their vehicle. Currently they have to discard the registration number information they obtain but it wouldn't take any new legislation for the government to insist that they pass the information on to the police and/or the DVLA. This would provide source and destination information for any vehicle on the road, as well as speed measurement over a known distance (anything from four miles to, potentially, tens or hundreds of miles). Big Brother is watching you already....

Brian Hunter

The government's announcement that GPS speed limiters are being seriously considered caused the email system to go into meltdown. Some of the more interesting points raised are printed here...

Seen on the IAM forum — Imagine being able to blame your crashes on an imperfect speed limiting system! ('It wasn't my fault, the computer should have known that there was a horse around the corner and slowed down')

Dave Razzell

What about hackers? A computer-controlled speed limitation system would offer tremendous potential for pranksters or worse who, by overriding the system's speed limits with their own, could reduce our roads to an immediate crawl or standstill.

Geoffrey Breakell

The estimated price of fitting a speed limiter is £200, but I cannot see where that price comes from. Given the cost of a GPS system now and the additional hardware required to install a limiter and the time to install I bet the cost of retro fitting one would be closer to £400.

Even at £200 that is £5,000,000,000 in capital expense to equip all existing cars, and then £400,000,000 in costs to fit them to new cars. The money could be far better spent.

Keith Walker

I am a member of the PACTS Vehicle Design Working Party which has discussed speed limiters for some time and its Road User Behaviour Working Party on which Oliver Carsten is Chairman. Dr Carsten will never accept an opposite view and ploughs ahead

with his agenda regardless of opposition. Rational arguments about his speed limiter project or anything else he holds dear are dismissed out of hand.

Even Carsten admits that the system is not yet suitable for single track vehicles (which includes powered two-wheelers) because of the danger of a sudden loss of power destabilising them during a manoeuvre. This leads to the question of speed limiters being likely to cause more problems than they solve if the whole vehicle parc is not fitted with them. We can't have the vehicle in front slowing down without warning if the following vehicle is not fitted with the same kit. If PTWs can't use them, then the system is not viable or, and I know Oliver Carsten would love this, PTWs would have to be banned. Presumably pedal cycles as sacred cows of transport policy would not. There is the additional problem of foreign drivers in the UK who would not have the systems fitted to their cars. Are they to be banned too? These are serious implications.

Whilst GPS may be accurate for finding one's position in the Sahara, it is insufficiently precise to locate the boundary of a speed limit to the last few centimetres. Even assuming the whole vehicle parc is fitted with these speed limiters, are vehicles likely to slow at different points on the road with more rear end collisions as a result?

Trevor Magnier

The GPS satellite system is not owned or controlled by the UK government. Set up by the US military it has a deliberate inaccuracy built into it for 'security reasons' (they increased the accuracy during the Gulf conflict). What happens if the system goes down or is disabled by its controllers for the same 'security reasons'? Do all the vehicles stop or is the restriction lifted? If the latter then the methods for incapacitating your receiver will undoubtedly become available via the internet rendering the whole thing unworkable. If the former, this country's mobility would be in the hands of a foreign power (or a terrorist group).

Maybe we are approaching this subject from the wrong direction. Why waste time trying to have a rational and educated argument with someone who isn't interested? Politicians only bow to the wishes of those who can damage their majority or raise the popularity of the opposition. Perhaps we should be lobbying the Tories to become the Motorists Party? We should start one of our own just as the 'Greens' did. 20-odd million motorists means 20-odd million potential voters with an axe to grind.

Gary Heywood

There's no way they'll bring in satellite control of drivers' speeds. They'd lose all the revenue from speeding fines!

Alan Wesson

Member services

Legal representation

The ABD is currently compiling a database of solicitors who are prepared to represent drivers. If you know of somebody who is prepared to help our members please get in touch with Chris Medd, whose contact details are on page 2.

Chauffeurplan

If you find yourself unable to drive for any reason you may find Chauffeurplan's service invaluable. Offered by Longford Insurance, it's an insurance policy against losing your licence or your car, with a 10% discount for ABD members. If you would like to find out more please contact Hugh Bladon (details on page 4) who will send you a leaflet. Alternatively you can get in touch with Chauffeurplan on 0800 24 24 20.

ABD T-shirts

If you would like to help publicise the ABD, why not buy a T-shirt with our details on? The T-shirts are top quality with a small ABD logo on the front and the logo, web-site address and telephone number on the back, along with the slogan "Don't let them drive you out of your car".

You can order one from ABD member Colin Gardom, for £10 (£10.50 for an XXL) including P&P. Write to ABD T-shirts at 39 St Mary's Gate Chesterfield Derbyshire S41 7TH Tel: 01246 230 005

Speed limits — how they are set and your right to object

The ABD has prepared an informative 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 current members. Please send a large SAE (26p) to

Steve Dommert
PO Box 3151
West Bergholt CO6 3JH

ABD publicity material

If you would like copies of the ABD leaflet please get in touch with Sue Newby-Robson (details on page 2), and she'll send you what you need. Car stickers, flyers and posters are all due soon.

Do you have e-mail?

When the ABD is asked to invite its members to respond to consultations we sometimes need to contact a lot of people in a short space of time. If you have an email address please subscribe to ABD Action, allowing us to save a lot of time and money in doing this. You can add your name to the list by sending an email to abd-action-owner@onelist.com stating your full name and ABD membership number.

Press releases

Each week the ABD sends out press releases to over 240 media organisations. Does your local paper have an e-mail address? Do you know a journalist or politician involved in transport issues who has never heard of the ABD?

The ABD sends out press releases via e-mail, and we are always looking to increase our circulation. We already cover the main national and regional publications — but new e-mail addresses are coming out all the time.

If you know of anyone who you think would benefit from receiving our releases, please let Chris Lamb know their e-mail address (c.a.lamb@staffs.ac.uk or ring the ABD press line on 0870 444 2535).

If you would like a copy of a press release please get in touch with Chris Medd. Once sent our press releases are put on the web-site — if you don't have the facility for this we will be happy to post you a copy.

24th January

Mobile phone campaign nearly right

19th January

The air quality lie

17th January

Milan's car ban is misguided

12th January

GPS speed limiters a liability

6th January

Speed limiters won't make roads safer

4th January

The link between speed and road safety

22nd December

The driver's mobility alert remains

ABD in the media

Each week the ABD appears in the media. Sometimes it's because of our press releases, but increasingly it's because we are the first port of call for media organisations who want the motorist's perspective. While this list is far from exhaustive, these are some of the media appearances the ABD has made over the last month.

A more complete and up to date list of media appearances can be found by logging on to the ABD web-site. If you see the ABD mentioned in the press please let Chris Ward know about it (chris@waverider.co.uk) or put them in the post to Richard Dredge (see page 4 for contact details).

Brian Gregory and Brian Mooney recently sent letters to over a thousand newspapers, periodicals, radio and TV stations around the country. The letter expressed concern over the debate on speed and road safety, and included contact details for the ABD. If you see it in your local paper could you please let us know - correspondence details are on page 4. We have already started receiving letters of support thanks to these letters being published — what we really need of course is more members!

Mark McArthur-Christie did an early morning interview on Talk Radio to speak about the proposed GPS speed limiters. The two aggressive interviewers weren't keen to let Mark make his point, but he was able to get over the points that speed limits are often

set subjectively. He also said that if all it took to be safe was an ability to stick to a speed limit the Government would be giving licences away on the back of cornflake boxes. The interviewers asked where all this speed kills stuff comes from, so Mark mentioned the TRL report that states it's a contributory factor in 27% of accidents.

Hugh Bladon had a much easier time being interviewed for the James Whale show, also on Talk Radio. Whale was far more rabid than Hugh — the former being a car fanatic apparently. Hopefully there will be plenty of free plugs for the ABD on Whales' show in the coming months.

Bernard Abrams did an interview for BBC Radio Devon, in the wake of David Beckham's speeding conviction being dropped. Once again the ABD's point of view was agreed with — not so difficult to achieve when you've got figures that nobody else is putting forward. It certainly makes people think when you tell them something that contradicts everything they've heard before.

A similar interview on Wiltshire Sound by Hugh suggested he was saying things about speed limits that hadn't been heard before by the interviewers. Worrying stuff.

The proposals for GPS speed limiters ensured plenty of exposure for the ABD. Both Autocar and Auto Express wanted some reaction, and What Car? were also after our side of the story — something they struggled to get elsewhere.

BBC Three Counties and Thames Valley continue to support us, Mark McArthur-Christie regularly appearing to discuss issues such as road tolls, traffic calming and road maintenance.

Web-sites to visit

Web-sites worth visiting are frequently pointed out to us. Below are some of the ones we've either discovered recently or visit regularly because the content is interesting — if you know of others please let us know.

www.its.leeds.ac.uk/projects/evsc/exec.pdf

For The full Leeds university report on the Speed Limiting device trials

www.racelogic.co.uk/1999/gps.htm

Find out about the company who brought you sequential gearshifts developing the technology for GPS speed limiters.

<http://www.press.detr.gov.uk/9912/1226.htm>

Details of the eight speed camera funding pilot project sites (see page 1 for details)

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/health/newsid_147000/147195.stm

For the full story on the Pedestrians' Association's claim that many pedestrians are suffering injuries similar to those sustained in car crash, simply through using the UK's pavements

<http://www.pedestrians.org.uk/>

The Pedestrians' Association launched their new web-site just before Christmas. Keep the blood pressure pills handy before you log on

<http://www.foe.org.uk/>

Don't look at this web-site if you've got a weak heart. There's not much here that an ABD member would agree with!