

On The Road

The journal of the Association of British Drivers

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If just one life is saved...

According to the Refined Bitumen Association, 74% of local authorities claim under-funding of highway maintenance programmes creates a threat to road users' safety. One in six believes it poses a "major threat".

Local authority highways' departments, which are responsible for 95% of Britain's roads, say they require nearly three times their current budgets to maintain roads adequately. They report a shortfall in road structural maintenance budgets of £1 billion, with each local authority highways' department being short-changed by almost £6 million this year.

news

Almost £50 million was paid out by local authorities last year to road users for accidents or damage to vehicles caused by the structural condition of roads, a 50% increase on the previous year.

"Whilst the RBA welcomes the Government's 10-year road safety initiative launched last month, it is apparent that a straightforward and cost-effective way of improving safety would be to provide secure funds for local authority highways'

departments so they can maintain roads properly."

The RBA survey finds that local authorities can afford to resurface roads every 78 years as opposed to the recommended 10 to 20 years. The need for structural maintenance has increased by 75% over the past ten years and over a third of the money received by highway departments is spent on reactive maintenance rather than preventative work.

One local authority claimed the current year's budget is the lowest in real terms since at least 1974. In 1993/94 they spent £1,060 per km on resurfacing. The figure for this year is £618. Next year's budget is likely to be cut by a third.

What about the motorist?

Labour continued to attempt to pull the wool over our eyes with the recent announcement that they were putting an extra £280m into transport.

Unsurprisingly it's public transport schemes that will get most of the new cash – two-thirds of it in fact.

Transport Minister Gus McDonald appeared on BBC Radio 4's Today programme crowing that public transport is to receive this huge investment. Bear in mind that it's been estimated London's tube network needs around £4bn of investment to get it up to scratch – and if that's the starting price you can bet it will double if work were to ever actually start.

It seems drivers should be grateful as some road congestion will be tackled. Apparently, McDonald rejected suggestions that the government had gone back on its high-profile campaign to get people out of their cars and onto public transport. It seems they're only trying to do the former – whether or not they want to do the latter is up to them.

"A 10-year plan will be announced this summer which will be the biggest investment in the infrastructure of transport the country has seen for a very long time." So it'll be massively underfunded by slightly less then.

Projects to get the go-ahead include a £30m extension to the Docklands Light Railway, taking it to London City Airport.

£20m will be spent on 80 projects to tackle accident blackspots or bottlenecks on the roads. £14m will be spent ensuring that pensioners receive free bus passes and pay no more than half fare. £30 million will go to local councils to spend on schemes for child safety and safe routes to school. That's a euphemism for lots of gatsos, speed humps and road narrowing schemes.

£14 million will go on grants to local councils to wipe out a proposed £5 charge for concessionary bus passes.

Automatic queue warning systems will be installed on the M6 in the West Midlands. Two more on the M25 in Surrey and the M56 to the south and east of Manchester. The cost will be £16 million. Advertising rather than eradicating the problem seems the preferred option.

The RAC Foundation, said: "We would like to see the government start to address congestion hotspots. If the government really wants to address the issue of car dependency, it must improve public transport and give motorists a real alternative to using their vehicles."

Stern stuff – that should make the difference. Prescott is probably ready to announce a U-turn on his anti-car policies.

The screw turns

Two County Councils have had their funding cut because their Local Transport Plans failed to show a commitment to reducing car use.

Herefordshire and Cornwall did worse than other councils in the December funding allocation of £755m because they had not embraced parking restraint.

The Government Office for the South West criticised Cornwall Council, saying "the ability to deliver targets for modal transfer in the absence of a clear parking strategy must be questioned."

Only councils who make life difficult for motorists will get money from central government!

Herefordshire's LTP was described as poorly developed because it lacked commitment to tackling car use. Staffordshire also got a good kicking for the same reason.

Derbyshire was praised for its commitment to maximum parking standards – minimising parking provision for new developments!

Southampton got it in the neck for building new car parks – LTP funding was not to be used for this purpose! However, Windsor and Maidenhead were encouraged to improve rail park and ride – how they were supposed to do this without building car parks was not suggested.

news briefs

20,000 Scotland Yard officers now face a day long assessment & a written exam before being allowed back behind a wheel.

Inspector Peter Rodger of Hendon police school said: "One of the teaching codes we use is what we call the 4 'S's. In order of importance, they are: safety, system [of car], smoothness and speed. Speed is the least important. Being an advanced driver is not about putting your foot down... So if driver training is so important for police drivers, why do Government advisers say it's a waste of time for everyone else?"

Government statistics show a slow down in the growth of traffic on Britain's roads. Traffic grew by an average 1.7% in 1998/1999 compared with an average 2.5% in 1996/97.

More than £4 million has been spent on limousines for senior diplomats since Labour came to power. This money has paid for 115 cars - an average of nearly £35,000 per car.

They range from £14,000 for a Ford Mondeo to more than a dozen adapted Rover 825 Sterlings at an average cost of more than £86,000 each.

A local newspaper has reported how a road narrowing scheme has been a huge success because 20 accidents didn't happen as a result of it. Not only this, but the accidents that didn't happen saved taxpayers over £300,000. Just imagine how many accidents wouldn't happen if driving standards were tackled!

In a recent press release, Speed Check Services were crowing about their first order for their new digital speed camera system. They claim "SPECS aims to deter speeding with enforcement as the last resort". Really?

They continue "SPECS creates Speed Controlled Zones which means that drivers will be required to drive within the speed limit throughout the whole area, not just a spot of the road." So not enforcement then?

There's the usual line about the need to reduce accidents by 40% within 10 years. I wonder if they're offering a refund if the system doesn't produce this reduction.

John Prescott was caught short on an unannounced trip on a Connex train. The three toilets were all unusable. One was blocked, one locked and a third overflowing. Shame.

Oxfordshire's bus companies claim a leap in passenger numbers proves Oxford's controversial transport strategy is working. This is on a par with the local authority who claimed last year that closing roads reduces traffic levels on those roads. Allow only buses to go into Oxford city centre and is there likely to be an increase in people using buses? They don't mention the huge increase in city centre crime since the ban on cars though.

Railtrack is suggesting raising track access charges around the port of Felixstowe for rail freight operators by up to 25%, forcing HGVs onto East Anglia's roads.

It seems the track is being used too much!

John Prescott recently said how the Government is putting so much of its money into public transport initiatives, making them very public spirited. Who's money?

Bus operator Stagecoach has cut service in the Lake District. Kendal will be a bus-free zone after 8pm throughout the week. Only one service will run during school holidays. They blame spiralling fuel prices for the cuts.

Norfolk County Council has gone ahead with its plans to "reclaim rural lanes for walkers and cyclists".

Their Quiet Lanes scheme is being piloted in a triangle of rural roads between Cromer, North Walsham and Bacton. Road signs are being changed to direct traffic away from the lanes. The idea is to persuade drivers to keep away from the quiet lanes, leaving them clear for walkers and cyclists.

Companies are to be charged a daily rate for digging up the street. They also face fines if they delay the completion of road works beyond a deadline.

Charges are likely to be higher in heavily congested streets and could be varied according to the number of lanes blocked off. It's undecided whether the charges will be paid to the Treasury or local authorities.

Leicester City and County Councils have unveiled plans to cut the number of cars on the roads. Plans include road tolls, workplace parking taxes, county-wide on-street parking charges, more park and ride schemes, a better bus service and improved pedestrian and cycle routes.

Dorset traffic police clocked cyclist Garth Hentley doing 63 miles per hour in a 60mph limit. He was, of course, let off. Suppose a pedestrian walked in front of him? What would his braking distance have been?

They claim the aim is to create a fully integrated, high quality transport system. So where are the measures for the car?

A recent survey showed that teenage drivers were more likely to have an accident if they had teenage friends in the car. RoSPA's response? Put sensors in the car so the engine won't start if teenagers are present!

Gloucester city's road humps are to be painted red to improve visibility. Campaigners reckon local drivers are more likely to slow down if they are painted red, despite already knowing they are there.

national contacts

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ignition

Nice to report some good news for once. Both Leicestershire and Lincolnshire Constabularies are offering free driver training in a bid to reduce accidents. The former are offering new drivers tuition on how to use motorways safely, while the latter are holding evening training sessions on their skidpan to show drivers how to control a skid.

An interesting case recently was the Birmingham boy awarded damages for being knocked down and severely disabled as a result. He was hit by a driver exceeding the speed limit.

The fact the driver was travelling too quickly doesn't seem to be disputed anywhere (he was doing over 40mph in a 30mph limit with adverse weather conditions to boot). What I find alarming is the fact that the boy could be absolved of any responsibility purely because the driver was breaking the speed limit. The boy was three at the time, and was able to run into the path of a car. Should the burden of blame really lie purely with the driver?

I was recently driving along a street at the 40mph limit. I'd been left behind by faster moving traffic, and there was nobody behind me. As I came to a junction on my left, through the windows of the parked

cars on the pavement I saw a teenage cyclist travelling towards the road I was on. It didn't look as though he would be able to stop, so I braked heavily.

He didn't look in either direction as he came straight out from the side road. He sailed round the front of my car, spat at me, then continued down the street the way I had just come.

A less alert driver would have had an accident, but the frightening thought is that if I had been going any faster I would have automatically been held responsible. It's episodes like this that make a mockery of current road safety practice. There are those who bleat drivers must shoulder the blame as they are less vulnerable than other road users. That may be so, but if you don't look after yourself you can bet nobody else will.

There are moves to get rid of hard shoulders replacing them with a 'safety strip'. Is this the greatest misnomer since 'traffic calming'? Maybe the idea is that as 30% of motorway accidents happen on the hard shoulder, by removing it these accidents will be eliminated!

With the summer fast approaching (honest) you'll be needing something fashionable and stylish to wear. Alternatively you could buy an ABD T-shirt, promoting us to the world. See page 8 for details.

The ABD needs a full-time, paid member of staff. We actually need several, but one would be a good start! If you know of somebody who would be prepared to put some money into the organisation, or you

run a business that can do so, any of the committee members listed below would be very happy to speak to you...

Having written to a lot of companies over the last couple of years we're finding it very difficult to secure any funding. What a shame the groups masquerading as pro-road safety aren't facing the same problems.

A few members have been in touch recently stating solicitors don't want to represent drivers, and our database of driver-friendly lawyers won't get off the ground. It's proving difficult to find people willing to be included, but we've already had one or two successes. The key is to find somebody who knows which questions to ask – don't use a solicitor who specialises in road accident claims, as somebody did. They won't know what to do with a speeding prosecution...

A lorry recently crashed through the central crash barrier of the M6 leaving three dead. The deaths wouldn't have happened if the barrier had done its job. We are told the £47,000 average cost of a speed camera is worth it even if it saves just one life. Strange how 'safety' measures that don't make any money are always too expensive...

As I write this, ABD posters are coming off the press. We'll do some A5 flyers as well if there are any members who are prepared to distribute them for us. If you can do some leafleting to publicise the group let me know and we'll get some printed.

A member recently gave me a good tip for getting some free publicity. When he's finished with his OTR each month he leaves it where it will be seen by others – waiting rooms at the dentist or doctor for example. If you just throw yours away why not try the same?

Chris Medd

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campaigning

Getting the hump

by Malcolm Heymer

If speed humps are constructed within the regulations (issued by the DETR) they are legal and there is no redress against the Council. To be legal, however, they must comply not just with the geometric requirements for individual humps but with maximum spacing requirements, distance from a junction to the first hump, lighting requirements and so on. There are probably many road hump schemes and other so-called 'traffic calming' schemes that breach the regulations one way or another and could be open to legal challenge.

It would be necessary to examine every aspect of the scheme in relation to the regulations to see whether it complies. Not many people would bother.

As for the maximum speed over a hump compared with the legal limit, the intention of a road hump scheme is to ensure that the speed limit is not exceeded anywhere along the road in question – the maximum speed is usually midway between humps, so to restrict that speed to 30 mph, the maximum 'comfortable' speed over the hump (if that is not a contradiction in terms) needs to be no more than 18 or 19 mph.

The DETR makes the regulations, so that is where any complaints should be directed.

A search facility on the onelist website allows a search of the archive of messages on abdml going back six months. It's useful for finding obscure facts you vaguely recall seeing a while back, and saves keeping a large personal message archive. The search facility is on www.onelist.com/messages/abdml

Hit for six

by Brian Hunter

Here's the EU's six-point plan to reduce road deaths...

- ⌘ Develop the car crash test programme
- ⌘ Speed limiters for light commercial vehicles and extend existing legislation which requires lorries over 12 tonnes and buses and coaches over 10 tonnes to be fitted with speed limiters (cars next?)
- ⌘ Public awareness campaigns and legislation to promote seatbelt use and child restraints
- ⌘ Legislation on safer car fronts to protect pedestrians and cyclists in the event of an accident
- ⌘ Recommendations to member states on maximum blood/alcohol levels of 0.5 grammes or less per litre of blood – the UK

level of 80mg per 100ml of blood would need to be reduced to 50mg. In the UK drink-driving convictions carry an automatic 12-month ban. While other European countries have a tougher limit they do not automatically disqualify drivers

⌘ Compiling a list of blackspots and develop guidelines for how they can be made safer (more speed cameras then?)

The EC recommends researching:

- ⌘ medical standards for driving licences
- ⌘ standards for driving tests
- ⌘ daytime running lights
- ⌘ the effects of medicine on drivers

So lots more regulation then, and no recognition of the fact that roads aren't just used by drivers of cars and lorries. Ideas on how to stop people wandering into the path of cars seem to be a bit thin on the ground.

A common purpose

by Tony Vickers

I spent the best part of a day at a meeting called Common Purpose.

What a depressing spectacle it was – the common purpose was to peddle anti-car propaganda. Endless talk about integrated transport policies which of course totally exclude the private car. Lots of calls for enforcement and restriction. Not one single pro-car statement from the

whole lot of them.

One member of the group I spoke to was a smug bloke from the BBC who seemed to believe that since he doesn't need to drive a car, neither should anyone else. How we can ever hope to get a fair presentation of our views from the Beeb when they have people like him working for them, I don't know.

The sad thing is that these days the views of every wierdo and nutcase are taken as seriously as if they were mainstream opinions.

Nevertheless, I put our views across and met one or two more or less sympathetic people during lunch.

Getting a look in

by Nigel Humphries

I recently went to a meeting of the Institute of Civil Engineers held in Worcester City Council's chamber, where I was part of a four man panel for a debate chaired by BBC Radio Hereford & Worcester.

The other panel members were from Friends of the Earth, Transport 2000 and the Road Haulage Association.

Each had five minutes to say their piece, and I went second after the FoE man. Questions were then put from the audience and each of us was able to reply, just like *Newsnight*.

I was able to put over the pro-car case well, but was not able to counter every point they made as there were so many. Three wonderful highlights stand out.

Someone in the audience pointed out the advances in cleanliness made by modern cars and promised for the future.

FoE man tried to take credit, saying it was them that forced the motor industry to fit catalyts.

I said how interesting it was that FoE were taking credit, and we would like some for the six years it had taken us to

force FoE to admit that catalyts were working and that air quality was improving. I ran through the air quality issues, stating that FoE's press office went berserk when any of the pollutants tripped over World Health Organisation safe levels, leading to people thinking it was like that all the time. I had a go at asthma, criticising a Travelwise poster that showed a child using an inhaler for being misleading and asking why such misinformation was still allowed.

FoE man then accused me of making a cheap political point at the expense of the 24,000 people who die prematurely due to car fumes.

What a gift. I said how I'd read that report from cover to cover and it didn't say that at all. The 24,000 were people already dying of diseases that finally kill most of us and that the link was only with the *time* of death, pulling it forward by up to two days. I repeated this several times, making it absolutely clear that this was only a statistical link for already dying people and could have been caused by the weather. FoE man failed to respond to this.

"These people can't handle anybody arguing against them. Get them in a debate and they're dead."

The last question was from an old Trades Unionist who was banging on about how wonderful pensioners' bus passes were in London, allowing people to travel freely all over London and have a good quality retirement. I agreed – it's what public transport should be all

about. Mindful of the need to sum up, I then switched to repeat that what we are against is negative restrictions on the car driver – parking, taxes, obstructions and bus lanes – not sensible bus lanes that didn't obstruct drivers but ones deliberately set

like in Edinburgh to maximise traffic obstruction.

FoE man then made his greatest mistake. "I find it difficult to understand the concept of bus lanes that don't obstruct other traffic – surely that is what they are for" he said.

"I rest my case," said I – FoE man had gone when I looked round.

These people do not know how to handle anybody arguing against them – it's as simple as that. Get them in a debate and they are dead.

campaigning

The speed kills 'debate'

by Nigel Humphries

Many ABD members have choked on their cornflakes over the reporting of road safety issues in the media. It is difficult to cover complex issues in a few minutes of air time, and sometimes it seems that there is too little real debate on road safety. When ABD spokesman Mark McArthur-Christie recently met up with Radio 4's Roger Harrabin (he was filming for the recent Panorama programme on safety and speed), we had the chance to tackle the different sides of the *Speed Kills* debate.

As a result of a recent article in OTR, Mr Harrabin has now written a letter for publication in OTR. It is excellent news that a high profile reporter is willing to debate the real issues behind *Speed Kills* with us, and so the ABD's Nigel Humphries has replied to Roger's letter on behalf of the ABD.

Roger's letter isn't typical of that found in OTR's letters pages but the factors that underlie safe driving are far more complex than *Speed Kills* would suggest, and so we welcome any chance to explore the issues.

At its inception, the ABD was principally concerned with raising the motorway speed limit. Literature used until quite recently criticised the Government for failing to introduce 20mph zones as early as other European countries.

It could be argued that our initial position was not all that far from what Roger is saying.

But as we looked at the realities of safe driving and thought about what was going on, our position changed. Unfortunately many people feel they are making an informed decision on road safety issues when they are getting only one side of the story. No wonder people say they are in favour of reduced speed limits - they want to see fewer deaths and injuries on the roads, and believe that lower speeds are the best way to reduce casualties and fatalities. But is this really the case?

Speed limits and their enforcement came to the forefront during the 1990s and influenced much - if not all - road safety thinking. But *Speed Kills* and the resulting speed reduction policies only tackle one element of safe driving - setting a safe speed for the conditions. Speed reduction has become a panacea for real or imagined safety problems. This has caused driving standards to be dumbed down to the point that the numbers of road casualties, and even the numbers of deaths, have stopped falling despite the continuing improvements in vehicle safety.

Kill Your Speed worsens the bad driving

that really causes crashes because it oversimplifies a vastly more complex issue.

This is even more relevant in an urban environment than on a motorway, as the variation in appropriate speed is much greater. In an area where a 20mph limit may be considered, the safe speed varies hugely. The best way to improve safety is to teach drivers to recognise the different hazards and adjust their speed accordingly, not to focus their attention solely on a speed limit which it is safe to exceed for much of the time but dangerous to travel at for the rest. It may even be the case that some parents who are in favour of 20mph limits actually drive like this - few may comply with the limits they support, and their driving could even be worse if they did!

Many supporting arguments for *Speed Kills* are found to be circular when properly analysed - they begin by assuming that speed is the biggest cause of accidents and that reducing it is the only way to proceed, then go on to 'prove' it. Take Roger's attack on TRL323's conclusion that pedestrians are to blame for most accidents - he assumes both that speed is the main cause and that the driver is only blamed if he is breaking the limit. He therefore concludes that the limit should be reduced to transfer more blame from pedestrian to driver. Nothing could be further from the truth. If a pedestrian runs out without looking into the path of a vehicle, he is responsible for the accident irrespective of the speed limit or the actual vehicle speed. TRL323 results rightly reflect this.

Accidents where the driver was blamed involved loss of control leading to mounting the pavement and hitting pedestrians on crossings. The 'speed is always to blame' school of thought has gone so far that recent DETR adverts suggest it's not the driver's fault if he kills a child on a crossing so long as he is within the speed limit. This dangerous rubbish absolves the driver from acting with due care and diligence, as well as the pedestrian. *Speed Kills* can only move us away from properly establishing accident causes and targeting resource where it is most effective and towards a destructive blame culture. The essence of road user education is the exact opposite - take responsibility for yourself and allow for the mistakes of others. The ABD has also argued against the conclusion that a

"Few will comply with the limits they support, and their driving would be worse if they did"

"Speed Kills can only move us away from properly establishing accident causes and targeting resource where it is most effective"

change of 1mph in average speed will affect accidents by 5%.

The report which reached this conclusion would have failed GCSE statistics on numerous counts and relied on only six studies - four of which involved motorways which many people agree should have higher limits! This statement is meaningless in real situations as the average speed of traffic along a whole road cannot bear any relation to the speed at which individual vehicles crash at specific points. Anyone who doubts this should think through the simplest of accident scenarios. But perhaps the most telling reality check comes with this assertion that 'only' 5% of children hit by a car at 20mph will be killed.

Drivers are currently doing much better than this by themselves - out of 18,000 child pedestrian injuries in built up areas, there are less than 100 fatalities - around 0.5%. If the Government succeeds in getting drivers to travel inattentively at 20mph, willingly giving up their three minutes of travel time, then they will potentially kill an extra 800 children a year.

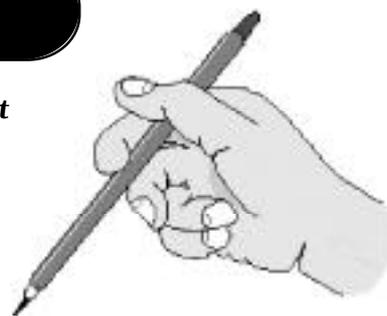
Effort would be far better spent analysing exactly how these low speed accidents are occurring and coming up with sensible advice for all road users on how to avoid them. After all, surely it's better to avoid the accident happening in the first place rather than reduce the speed of impact.

The UK has the safest roads in Europe - if you're an adult. But child casualty rates are very high - among the worst in Europe.

Is this because adults are less likely to be killed if hit by a car at a given speed, or because adults are less likely (than a child) to be hit by a car? It's partly the former, but mainly the latter.

Children are increasingly being led to believe that road safety is not their responsibility. Most of the road safety campaigns aimed at children seem to concentrate on telling them to drive slowly when they are old enough to get behind the wheel. Instead of this approach should we not educate all road users - pedestrians included - that there is a risk in travelling that has to be managed by attention, observation and care? Drivers must take their share of the responsibility - too many turn the engine on and their brains off - but simply slowing them down is not the answer, and promotes the fatal view that "All I have to do to be safe is stick to the limit". The aim of road safety should be to prevent accidents happening in the first place - not merely reducing their effects by slowing drivers down.

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.com

The Government is keen on speed limits near schools and this is an area where our presence needs to be felt both to ensure that they (or local councils) get it right and to gain positive publicity for the ABD. I am all for limits at times when they are necessary only.

Has it been established that a significant proportion of child deaths occur near schools or is it just an assumption?

If this has been proven then some form of timed flashing lights device would be ideal. We should also push for more crossing patrols.

If speed past schools is such a problem why are speed traps never seen near schools at peak times? I don't think I've ever seen one. Why is so much attention placed upon motorways and dual carriageways?

If permanent 20mph limits appear the police will be there in force on sunny Sunday mornings. This must be discouraged.

Dave Razzell

I was recently caught apparently exceeding a 30mph limit at 5.30pm on a Sunday, by a police patrol which was parked in the school exit – the gates of which were locked.

Their reason for issuing a Statutory Penalty was that "someone might have been driving out of the school grounds (note above), and even if there wasn't, there might have been a group of children playing by the hedge, dressed in dark clothing, who might have jumped into the road".

Even though asked numerous times in writing, the Traffic Force concerned refused to supply any details about the accuracy of the LTI 20/20 laser gun which they were using as they "did not feel it was appropriate".

So much for innocent until proven guilty.

Tim Lawrence

My wife is head of infants at a school in Oxfordshire. Recently a seven-year old girl was knocked down on a 30mph residential street to which the school road is linked by a T-junction. The girl, I am told, has little road sense and stepped into the path of a car. She suffered only minor injuries as the car was been driven at a speed significantly lower than 30mph. However, this accident has prompted parents to start a petition to lower the speed limit on this road to 20mph.

When this was put in front of my wife she refused to sign it. She pointed out that lowering the limit would have no effect on those who insist on driving inappropriately fast, and that in any case the girl stepped directly in front of a car. She mentioned that lowering limits to daft levels can actually increase traffic speeds. This was unheard of and led to lively discussion over lunch, the result of which was general agreement with what she had said and the decision being

made to introduce some road safety training into the classroom.

It transpires that there was already one such scheme in the pipeline called *Footsteps*. This is organised by the Lollipop men and women but they seem to have a good deal of equipment (plastic crossing mats etc) so there may be some additional Council funding too. The scheme revolves around taking children out of classes a few at a time to be taught road sense in half hour chunks.

Unfortunately the law stipulates that children may not leave a class during the school day so hardly an ideal start! I am trying to find out more, but it all seems pretty low-key to say the least. Doesn't quite fit in with the 'Speed Kills' mantra I suppose.

Among those directly involved in education there is a significant number of teachers who do not swallow the 20mph nonsense, nor for that matter the environmental line being forced on them by the Government. Colleagues of my wife whom I have met over the years have, with a few notable exceptions, been a largely sensible and intelligent bunch of people. There is hope yet.

Damon Green

While I sympathise sincerely with Bill Piggott (*Letters, Issue 34*), and have myself suggested that we ally ourselves with a much bigger organisation such as the RAC, recent experience suggests his theory would not stand up in practice.

As well as ABD, I am also connected with the UK Independence Party which eschews the EU and all its doings including the Euro. Having succeeded in getting two MEPs elected to Brussels at the last election, they got big ideas and put up a candidate for the Ayr by-election. I warned them that they might undermine the Tories, who have very similar views on the EU. In the event their vote was under 100 and, of course, they lost their deposit, which they could ill afford.

The ABD must learn from that experience and forget any thought of starting a political party. But, it would make sense to approach the Tories suggesting that they publicly support our campaign, in return for our support at the next election. Their views are very similar to ours, anyway, and at this stage they are likely to welcome any support they can trumpet!

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.

I see no harm in this suggestion, since there is no chance of Prescott/New Labour ever accepting our views – their advisers will take care of that. Moreover, it might well counter the 'public apathy' you mention.

Peter Spinney

The ABD will never become politically aligned. Political parties have a habit of renegeing on promises made – Ed.

I refer to Bill Piggott's letter regarding the setting up of a 'motorists' action party'. This has happened – Geoffrey Ben-Nathan is a mayoral candidate for Pro-MaSS (Pro-Motorist and Small Shop). See his website www.pro-mass.co.uk for policies. He needs all the help and support he can get.

On-line parking advice obtained from my website at www.parkingticket.co.uk has helped two London borough residents to successfully appeal against eight parking tickets issued by their council. The couple were in the process of moving to a controlled parking zone. The council wouldn't issue a permit because their car was registered at their old address. They were told to put a note for the parking attendant on the windscreen saying that the application for a resident's permit was with the council. They ended up with eight parking tickets!

Since its launch in February there has been a steady flow of visitors to the site.

John Squires

I've just received the latest Cycling Touring Club (CTC) magazine and I'm tempted to resign. They say they're not anti-car and have said as much in response to my accusatory letters. In this edition is an article on *The human cost of speeding* where they give credence to a *Slower Speeds Initiative* publication. You can guess the content. Why let the facts get in the way of a good story?

There is also an article entitled *Incitement to kill* asking all CTC members to complain where they see car adverts encouraging dangerous driving. Several members are complaining about a Rover ad where the car is in sharp relief against a blurred background. The argument appears to be that if we see this we will drive at daft speeds everywhere.

The CTC have formally linked with Sustrans (a pro-cycling group campaigning for more cycle tracks) and the magazine contains a leaflet outlining the aims of both parties. The outlined aims of Sustrans contains the following timeless prose:

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**

'We seek to reverse our present car-dependent transport culture which is contributing to climate change and sea level rise, to pollution and ill-health, and which causes so much danger and disruption within local communities.'

If you feel inclined to voice objection at the above try www.sustrans.org.uk or www.ctc.org.uk

Damon Green

Someone recently said to me if a law is on the statute books it must be enforced. There must be literally hundreds of old laws still on the statute books which cannot be enforced - laws such as the one which says that all able-bodied men have to practice archery every Sunday.

Imagine if they tried to enforce these! If a law no longer serves any useful purpose, or is completely ineffective in its original purpose, it should be modified or scrapped.

I wonder how many other laws people are unknowingly forced into breaking - such as obstructing the free flow of traffic - by sticking to an unreasonably low speed limit.

Peter Hattingh

If you look at the DETR web site there are a couple of tables listing the number of vehicle km per year and the number of passenger km per year by various modes of transport. Divide one by the other and you get the average vehicle occupancy. This works out (for 1997) at just over 1.5 people per car and just under 9 people per bus.

Buses are more efficient in usage of road space, until they stop to pick up passengers or wreck the road so it has to be repaired.

The wear on the structure of the road is proportional to the axle weight of the vehicle to the power of four. A single decker bus is around 10,000kg.

So one of these buses does around 5000 times the damage to the road as a 1200kg car, and as they are only 2 axle vehicles a 40000kg 6 axle lorry only does 50 times as much damage (and only then when loaded).

Keith Walker

David Britten's letter in OTR 34 is fundamentally incorrect. He reckons the petrol yield from crude oil is as low as 0.36%, when the actual figure is more like 30%.

Most crudes give an immediate yield of c.10%, but depending on consumer requirements can give up to 80%.

Globally, petrol production accounts for 30% of the crude oil used.

Dennis Kaye

I recently decided to attend a Biddulph Urban Area Transport Strategy Consultation meeting, part of the Staffs Local Transport Plan consultation that affects my home village.

On arrival I was told it was a regeneration forum meeting, not a transport consultation. After I waved my letter of invitation it was agreed that the transport consultation meeting was included in the regeneration forum meeting, but it was a closed session only considering previously received written submissions. I handed over my written notes for my intended presentation and left.

When I got home I phoned the local paper and asked if they would like to investigate the idea of a consultation meeting being held in private and excluding those who wished to be consulted.

I told the reporter I had been in touch with three councillors, none of whom were aware of the 'local consultation' - she got quite interested.

Then I had a phone call from a Staffs County Transport officer. I now have a seat on what is called a 'Leaders Advisory Body' for my area, and now have a part to play in deciding how to proceed with the input from the consultation process.

Was this the power of the press or coincidence? I now wait to see if this offer is put in writing and how much I can influence this group.

Dave Hammond

I would like to reply to the consistent criticisms in *On The Road* that the *Panorama* I reported on road safety was biased. Two complaints have been made: the ABD's Mark Christie was cut, and the emphasis on speed.

I regret that Mark was dropped from the programme, but we dropped the entire car

auction sequence in which he was located. We intended to find drivers vehemently opposed to 20mph zones. We did find some, but we also found drivers who felt neutral and others (particularly mothers) strongly in favour. This suggests there's no such thing as a motorist's view. Reading *On the Road* suggests otherwise, but membership of the ABD is naturally self-selecting.

The ABD refers to the TRL report 323 on involvement of excessive speed in accidents. This report can be misleading, as it bases its findings on actual speed, not appropriate speed. Suppose a road through a village has a 60mph speed limit. If a child crossing the road outside their school is killed by a car, they are deemed to be at fault under the TRL report unless the car is travelling at over 60mph.

This defies logic as it doesn't question the appropriateness of the limit or whether the child is forced to cross the road to reach the school.

Under TRL 323, a driver hitting a child at 32mph on a narrow street with parked cars either side would not be deemed to have been involved in an accident in which excessive speed was a factor. This defies common sense - the speed limit is the maximum, not the mean speed.

TRL report 421 shows that a 1% increase in speed leads to a 5% increase in accidents. These figures refer to accident data collected over decades in several countries, and are not disputed by safety professionals.

In Holland children walk and cycle three times more than British children, but British children are more than twice as likely to be hurt. An analysis concluded the greatest cause for the disparity was the time children in Britain spent on roads with higher speeds.

Hit by a car at 20 mph, only one in 20 children dies. Hit by a car at 40 mph and 17 out of 20 die. Speed kills.

Speed is not the only factor, and I would have liked to spend more time in the programme examining driver training. This is a subject to which I intend to return. But I feel overall that we got the balance right.

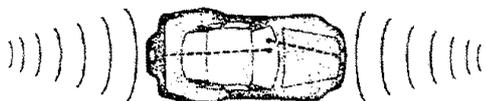
Society has changed hugely to the benefit of motorists like myself. But risk has been transferred to people who can't drive, or who choose not to. It's appropriate to question whether it's right for one group of people to increase the risk of injury or death to others while improving their own safety and mobility.

Roger Harrabin

See page 5 for a response to this - Ed

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Radar defence systems



For the very best advice on purchasing a portable or installed radar/laser detector, speak to the experts...
For a free information pack contact Networx Ltd at

20 Hillhouse Farm Gate
Lanark
Lanarkshire ML11 9HT

Tel 01555 666 444
Fax 01555 66 33 44

networx.ltd@dial.pipex.com



20% discount for ABD members!

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 Chris Medd (see page 4 for contact details). Please note that an email address will have the "@" symbol in it — many of the 'email addresses' given to us are actually web-site addresses.

Mark McArthur Christie has had a busy month. An interview on BBC Radio 5 live, talking about the new pyramid funding of speed cameras (ie making them self-financing) allowed him 5 minutes to speak practically uninterrupted. Even better was Radio 1's use of the interview — they used an excerpt in their hourly news updates.

BBC Three Counties Radio gave Mark some airtime — again on speed cameras. A very sympathetic hearing, with the presenter stating that on air that he agreed with us. BBC Radio Berkshire were equally supportive of us on the speed cameras and pyramid funding issue. Another good interview with plenty of chance to get our points across.

The new way of funding speed cameras was a good opportunity for us as Brian Gregory also did several interviews. BBC Radio Glasgow and BBC Radio Wales interviewed Brian at length about the implications of this move.

Those of you who get the Telegraph will have seen the latest suggestion from the DETR that motorists should pay to use a 'fast' lane to avoid jams and that they can 'book' a space on the road as they would on a train or airplane. Hugh

Bladon did an interview with Radio Humberside and poured scorn on the idea, firstly that it was not yet 1st April, second that the civil servants in the DETR must be smoking something strange! Hugh then spoke at length about the more important matters of the amount of tax we pay which is not being spent on the roads and thus not keeping up with the extra vehicular usage and finally the fact that the whole country needs to wake up and realise that big brother will be able to monitor their every movement. He had an easy time of it since the presenter was obviously in tune with our thinking.

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 Richard Dredge. 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.

11th April

Blunkett in a spin

21st March

Mixed response to the budget

21st March

Govt fails to meet road safety targets

Web-sites worth visiting

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.number-10.gov.uk

Number 10's forum. Click on Your Say, then Speakers Corner, then Transport.

www.westsussex.gov.uk/su/casualti.pdf

Here are some interesting road casualty figures for West Sussex It's interesting how low down the list of accident causes comes excess speed, the biggest cause being inattentive or distracted drivers. They also mention that it is a pity that the public demand engineering rather than educational measures!

www.nabi.hu/strategy_and_vision/index_en.html

The North American Bus Industries group (NABI) They say a bus today, which was designed according to the latest environmental standards, still emits as much pollutants over the course of its lifetime as 110 modern passenger cars.

<http://jrscience.wcp.muohio.edu/html/globalchange.html>

Have a look at this for links to articles on climate etc

www.southyorks.police.uk

South Yorkshire Police have put their speed camera locations on the web. However, these would seem to be portable speed cameras, not GATSOs. Crass statement of the month goes to them for: What's the difference between a school and a mortuary? Answer: 5 miles an hour.

<http://www.handbag.com/motoring/>

The handbag.com motoring section has a discussion forum on motoring. Postings seem to be from women keen on cars, with not a greeny in sight, so we could do with a few of our female members starting some interesting topics in there!

Member services

Chauffeurplan

If you are 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 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 call Chauffeurplan on 0800 24 24 20.

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 membership number.

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

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 Richard Dredge, whose contact details are on page 2.

ABD publicity material

If you would like copies of the ABD leaflet please get in touch with Susan Newby-Robson (details on page 2), and she'll send you what you need. There's also a limited stock of car stickers available. Flyers and posters are due soon.

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 Dommett PO Box 3151 West Bergholt CO6 3JH