

On The Road

The journal of the Association of British Drivers

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Cars too clean?

The suicide rate among men is falling because anti-pollution technology in modern cars has reduced the danger of exhaust poisoning, according to new research.

Dr Mike McClure, a fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, believes that the introduction of catalytic converters into new cars during the past decade has had a significant effect on the number of males killing themselves.

His study of suicides from 1960 to 1997 in

news

England and Wales found that between 1990 and 1997 the number of male suicides dropped sharply, from 120 per million men, to 103 per million. Dr McClure found that in the 1970s and 1980s, when car ownership increased by 45%, there was an increase in the number of deaths caused by carbon monoxide poisoning from car exhausts.

In the 1990s, when it became law to fit all

new cars with catalytic converters, the rates for suicide by motor vehicle exhaust poisoning fell from 41 per million to 16 per million, a decrease of 61%.

But Antony Tiernan, campaign co-ordinator, said: "It is important to remember that in 1997 nearly 3,000 men committed suicide, most of whom were between the ages of 17 and 25. He said: "Even with a decrease, this number outweighs the number of men killed in road accidents and it is vital that ministers do not treat surveys like this with complacency."

Council for the Persecution of Rural Englishdrivers

Yet another alarmist report has been published by The Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE), who claim that £540 million is needed to make a difference in rural communities living in fear of dangerous roads.

The CPRE have launched their Safer Villages Toolkit which provides for every village in the country to have an interactive speed responsive sign, triggered by speeding motorists. It also calls for 38 police forces in England to be equipped with 20 mobile speed video cameras and each village to have the sensors, signs and traffic

management needed for mobile speed cameras to operate.

The toolkit also calls for every village to have up to six village signs at entrance points and junctions, a signs audit to assess which contribute to road safety and which could be removed, plus a rural kill your speed campaign.

Paul Hamblin, CPRE's head of transport, said: "For too long villages up and down the land have

been plagued by speeding traffic. And forecasts indicate the countryside will get it in the neck again as traffic grows faster in rural than urban areas."

CPRE favours a national speed limit for villages, sending a clear signal to drivers

to slow down, rather than leaving the job to individual local authorities, which could lead to a profusion of signs and leave drivers confused.

Unfortunately there's no mention of driver training, and maybe it's cynical to say so, but maybe the real situation is rather different from that stated?

The ABD has learned of the existence of the Centre for Independent Transport Research in London. It's chaired by Roger Higman, the public face of Friends of the Earth. How very independent!

Official: fuel is too cheap

In his March budget, Gordon Brown is expected to increase petrol costs by up to 3% above inflation. This will put unleaded up by 3p a litre, making a gallon of unleaded £3.59 (79p a litre) — 32% more than when Labour took office in May 1997.

The actual rate will be higher because of further rises of up to 14p a gallon over the next four weeks as crude prices increase.

Last month Britons typically paid 75.3p per litre, compared with 62p in Germany, 52.7p in Ireland, 46.5p in Spain and 21.1p in the USA. In parts of Scotland, prices were 23p a gallon above the UK average.

Transport initiative?

A recent survey showed that accidents are more common in Surrey than in any other county in England. In response, Surrey County Council have just announced a plan to introduce various new measures, including more 20mph limits, digital cameras, traffic calming and greater enforcement of speed limits.

The director of the environment at the county council, Dr Richard Shaw, dismissed the idea that speed controllers were a civil liberties issue.

He said: "The police do not enforce speed limits very well for various reasons," and therefore, he added, the council had to step in

and use technology to combat speeding.

Dr Shaw confirmed that the council was in discussion with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and a private company in Surrey to look into the use of speed control devices and "to explore the potential for a trial application" within Surrey.

A "significant sum" will be ring-fenced for the implementation of the new policy, including money for the purchase of speed cameras.

ABD member Lorraine Pinner took part in this consultation, and her report is on page four. Although there is a focus on speed reduction, it would appear that our members' input wasn't dismissed.

news briefs

Derbyshire County Council is preparing to charge up to £3 for motorists wanting to use the only road that leads to the Ladybower visitor centre, one of the most popular attractions in the Peak District National Park. The centre is visited by about 250,000 people a year, but the local authority says it wants to deter cars.

The council will charge tolls on the two-mile road next February — the revenue used to improve local bus services, facilities for cyclists and walkers and provide a mini-bus "shuttle" from nearby car parks and rail stations.

Wolverhampton traders are celebrating after highways chiefs reversed a decision to turn a main thoroughfare into a bus lane.

They have been campaigning for the bus lane to be reopened to all traffic after losing thousands of pounds in passing trade. One company was left on the brink of closure.

Plans to introduce a controversial workplace parking tax could cost the West Midlands hundreds of jobs.

The West Midlands Local Government Association have calculated up to 116,000 spaces could become liable for a £250 per year payment, generating £29 million from business parking each year from the West Midlands if the tax is introduced in 2003.

It's estimated the region needs £400 million to bring its public transport system up to a standard likely to prove acceptable to Brimingham's commuters.

Traffic heading for Lake District beauty spots has not increased for the last nine years says Cumbria Tourist Board chief

executive Chris Collier. She was speaking at a conference of the Northwest Development Agency in Manchester after BBC broadcaster John Humphrys, who was chairing the debate about the future of the region, had commented that "too many people" wanted to go to the Lakes.

John Prescott has been urged by West Midland transport chiefs to refuse Land Rover's plans for a £40 million rail link. Bosses at public transport authority Centro have warned Mr Prescott that the rail link to Land Rover's Solihull factory would cause chaos for local train services.

Centro has told Mr Prescott that it must not go ahead because the West Coast Mainline between Coventry and Birmingham cannot cope with any more trains.

Land Rover wants to run 24 freight trains a day in and out of their Lode Lane plant.

The rail link would take 100,000 lorry journeys off local roads each year, but Centro has

said it should not be built unless the Birmingham to Coventry stretch of the West Coast Mainline is expanded from two to four tracks.

Centro and train companies, including Virgin, have been calling for a doubling of the track, but Railtrack has not agreed.

Bus routes around Sheffield are having their early morning bus services cut as transport chiefs bid to balance its

budget, as bus operators have substantially increased the charges they make for running subsidised services.

The local authority wants to keep all the services to strengthen its efforts to encourage more people to use public transport, as laid out in the city's local transport plan. But the necessary cash is not available. "The Government has made a commitment to green transport but so far we have not had extra resources," a spokesman said.

Owners of houses up to 300m from a new road can claim compensation for a property's loss of value under the 1973 Land Compensation Act. In one case — an eight-mile stretch of the A27 in Sussex — 2,500 pay-outs were made at a cost of £22 million — £2 million more than the road cost to build. But a 10-year protest campaign to have the carriageway resurfaced — for less than £1 million — has so far fallen on deaf ears.

A transport pressure group has been set up to give Norfolk's bus travellers a voice. Norfolk Buswatch will monitor services and press for improvements for passengers.

Norfolk Buswatch is an offshoot of Norwich and Norfolk Transport Action Group, and it can be reached by telephone or fax on 01603 496686 between 9.30am and 3.30pm, Monday to Friday. Postal address is PO Box 158, Norwich NR4 7JP.

The government is preparing to name local authorities with the worst congestion levels in a bid to slash traffic jams. However, an AA survey has revealed that of the top ten traffic black-spots in Britain only two of them are local council's responsibility. The other eight are made up by motorways, which are financed by the government.

Braintree saw its worst road fatality figures ever in 1999. The solution? Bocking police have been signed up to Essex County Council's annual Make the Commitment to Kill Your Speed. Sadly no mention of any other measures "

Bristol City Council have started a campaign to get motorists to switch off their engines while standing in queues for more than 45 seconds. They want to cut down on pollution, but haven't figured out that constant restarting of the engine will actually increase emissions...

national contacts

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ignition

The year 2000 marks the eighth year of the ABD, and it would be difficult to argue that things have improved for drivers in the UK within that time. On pages six and seven are three articles that illustrate only too well the contempt in which drivers are held.

The first piece isn't all bad, but shows how the anti-car lobby have a stranglehold on local government. The other two articles make frightening reading, and unfortunately they are not unique examples of drivers' needs being ignored.

The ABD is unique in its aims, but the groups we oppose are numerous, vociferous and generally well funded. The Cyclists Touring Club, RoSPA, Council for the Protection of Rural England, Brake, Roadpeace, Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth are some of the more well known — there are many less well known. Until recently they seemed to have the upper hand in campaigning, in that public opinion is officially on their side. But things are changing — albeit very slowly.

What we need desperately is an income besides that generated by our members' subscriptions. If you know of an organisation or individual who would be prepared to inject some funds into the ABD I'd very much like to hear from them. To move forward we need to have a full-time paid member of staff — something we can presently only dream about.

I was recently contacted by the Cyclists Touring Club to see why I had not renewed my subscription. It seems there has been such a mass exodus from the group that something has got to be done to reverse the situation — and fast. Perhaps most of their driving members have woken

up to the fact that many of the policies pursued by the CTC don't benefit anyone at all — not even the cyclists the group is supposed to represent.

The ABD has been granted a club stand at the classic car show at the NEC on April 29th and 30th. We'll have some cars on display and plenty of display material putting the driver's case forward. If you'd like to help for a few hours over that weekend get in touch and let me know.

I'm generally sceptical about surveys and how representative they are, but the RAC have published a report illustrating how families save hundreds of hours and more than £1,000 a year by using the car rather than public transport.

Among a national sample of almost 1,600 drivers, average commuting times were found to be 84 minutes by public transport and 25 minutes in the car. Typical return fares were £14.20 while equivalent motoring costs were only £8.20.

School runs, a particular target of Government advisers wanting to reduce car usage, were estimated to

take 21 minutes on average, against a bus or train alternative of 62 minutes. Individual costs were £1 by car, but £2.20 on public transport.

Shopping, trips to leisure venues, visits to friends or family and journeys in the course of work were also found to be much quicker and cheaper by car. According to RAC figures, the overall time savings added up to more than 40 full days a year for a working couple with school-age children, while car use would reduce their transport expenses by at least £1,000.

The report noted that the cost of owning and operating a car had fallen by 40% relative to household income since the mid-Sixties. Over the same period, bus travel had become more expensive, while rail fares had remained broadly flat. Does any of this sound familiar?!

ABD member John Squires has launched a web-site all about parking legislation. This may not seem a very sexy subject, but as an expert in his field it's well worth a visit. You can find it at: www.parkingticket.co.uk

Towards the end of last year the ABD tried to launch a register of driver-friendly solicitors. Since publicising this I've had quite a few requests for help with driving charges, but not many offers of help in terms of contact details of solicitors. If you know of anyone who may like to be included, please let me know.

You may be wondering why there's no mention of the recent gatso ruling in this issue of OTR. The reason is simple — it's proving impossible to ascertain exactly what the position is. As soon as we find out we'll let you know.

Chris Medd

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campaigning

The following three articles have been written by ABD members who have experienced the lack of balance in the transport debate. The first one (thanks to many ABD members taking the time to write) isn't as anti-car as it could have been. Sadly that's not so for the other two...

Jumping on the bandwagon

by Lorraine Pinner

Surrey County Council (SCC) appointed a Technical Services Performance Review Committee (PRC) in September 1999, to investigate how Surrey County Council are doing with Speed Management and School Transport, making recommendations where necessary.

Their report was presented to the council on 15th February 2000, having worked in conjunction with SCC's Environment Committee, who were in the process of developing a new speed management policy. This was approved in January 2000, so we can expect to see the effects of that on Surrey's roads soon.

The speed management section of the report begins by citing Surrey's road casualty statistics for 1998, and associates this with speed, thereby setting a bias right from the outset. Having said that, I think the association between speed and accidents was an ignorant assumption rather than a deliberate misrepresentation.

Several ABD members provided input to the PRC's study, following coverage in the local press in November. It seems our input wasn't wasted, as the PRC's report contains direct quotes from some of our members, both in an appendix and in the main body of the report, and the ABD is mentioned by name.

In spite of the public's submissions (most of which seemed to be against lower limits, apart from around schools, hospitals etc.), it seems that one of the main decisions of the committee was to jump on the speed enforcement bandwagon, including digital cameras and zero tolerance policies. The report cites the TRL's report 58, which concludes that higher speeds mean more accidents.

The report made the following recommendations:

- Use of mobile speed cameras
- Legislative change to allow reinvestment of speeding fines, to fund more speed enforcement
- Variable speed limits around schools, and on other roads
- Education in schools covering pedestrian safety, driving skills and cycling proficiency
- Publicity to promote speed management
- Traffic calming schemes, including gateways, differing road surface colours, road narrowing and chicanes
- Launching model driver schemes,

targeting company car drivers through large companies

Speed management policy

Surrey's new speed management policy was included as an appendix to the report. As this has been approved, all the recommended actions will happen:

- Working party including reps from police, DETR, freight operators, council, government offices

- No blanket limits

- Drivers often exceed posted limits, so many requests for changes to local speed limits could be answered by vehicles being driven within the limit currently posted"

- They mention that appropriate speed may vary, then say that they

"In spite of the public's submissions (most of which seemed to be against lower limits, apart from around schools, hospitals etc.), it seems that one of the main decisions of the committee was to jump on the speed enforcement bandwagon"

may force speeds lower than the posted limit in defined locations in order to bring them in line with

"appropriate vehicle speed". No suggestion that these methods of forcing

lower speeds will be removed when the conditions dictate that a

higher speed is appropriate

- We can expect to see lower speed limits, traffic calming and

enforcement to bring traffic speeds down to the defined "appropriate vehicle speed"

- Appropriate vehicle speeds are being decided based on a points system, which they have trialled and found to be in need of further adjustment and modification.

A fair cop?

By Paul Gander

Last summer I was stopped for doing 101mph in a 70 limit on a deserted

dual carriageway in ideal driving conditions. The 101mph was

recorded on a laser gun — an LTI 20.20 and I was riding a

Ducati motorcycle. I pleaded not guilty and after a number

of Pre-Trial Reviews I finally got to court in January.

The evidence consisted solely of the fact that the laser gun was pointed

at me and recorded my speed — uncorroborated evidence of the police

officer is not enough to convict. In the police training manual, the manufacturer's

instruction manual and the Association of Chief Police Officers instructions, it

repeatedly states the tests that must be conducted to ensure the laser gun works

accurately so its evidence can stand up in court. The device *must* be measured for the

accuracy of its speed measurement. It should have a calibrated police car driven

at it at each site that it's used, before and after any enforcement period. Also as the

aiming scope and the laser beams

themselves are not the same they must be checked for alignment. To do this a small, thin target is selected, such as a telephone pole at a 100 to 200m range and the alignment of the aiming device is checked. The policeman admitted he had lost his notebook with the information relating to this case. He admitted he hadn't performed the speed measurement tests or the alignment tests.

He was adamant he'd aimed the laser gun between my headlights — it was then pointed out that my Ducati has only one headlight — so he changed his story. The only test he'd performed was to point the laser at a nearby bus shelter to see if a beam was coming out. Aiming accuracy was very important as another motorcycle was right behind me. The laser beam diverges at 3 milliradian (3mm per metre) so at over 300m range it's covering an area larger than my bike. Then take account of aiming accuracy which even when set up as per instructions can be well away from where it's being aimed. Both of these issues together mean they can't be sure whether the laser hit me or the other bike.

Next up was the police 'expert' witness — who turned out to be the MD of the company who sells the LTI in the UK. Obviously independent and unbiased then!

Almost immediately he admitted that he was "not a technician" and therefore could only give a simple explanation of how the LTI worked. He'd written much of the operating manuals — including the bits where it was detailed as "critical" that these tests be conducted and must be "scrupulously" adhered to.

The police had no other evidence. So in summary the police had not conducted

any tests on the device that all of the manuals and even their "expert"

witness had stated were critical. At this stage proceedings were

a bit like a Monty Python sketch. Later on the main magistrate

asked me a question, which apparently in legal terms means

he is trying to work out whether to ban me! This was before all the

evidence had been heard!

Naturally I was found guilty and fined £810 with £300 costs — total £1,110

and received 6 points — but no ban.

Seems very just — doesn't it? A friend on recent jury service where someone was

found guilty of an assault tells me that the guilty man was fined only £1,000 — so it's

obviously much more serious to be doing 101mph on a deserted road in ideal

conditions — endangering no one, than to actually assault someone.

Possession of drugs or burglary is likely to get you a fine of less than a third of my fine.

To appeal this to a proper court will cost me a couple of thousand more in legal costs. All seems very fair and just.

"He said he'd aimed the laser gun between my headlights — it was then pointed out that my Ducati has only one headlight — so he changed his story"

campaigning

Traffic calming?

by Nigel Humphries

In May last year, a 'consultation' by the Highways Agency detailing proposals for so-called traffic calming on the A38 near my home dropped through my letterbox. This trunk road runs parallel to the M5 so it's used by relatively light local traffic. It's generally a wide A-road, with two villages being targeted in the plans. The larger one (Kempsey) has a sensible, well observed 40mph limit and the smaller, Severn Stoke, has a 30mph limit which is reasonable for about half its length.

The Highways Agency went to town on the consultation — glossy leaflets detailing the extensive zones of garish red tarmac to be applied to both villages, making great play of some very small extensions to the "existing" 30mph speed limits in those villages.

Three other settlements adjacent to the A38 were to receive 30mph limits. The fact Kempsey was to have its limit reduced from 40 to 30mph wasn't mentioned.

When I attended one of the two public meetings arranged by the Highways Agency the full horror of the scheme became apparent. Far from putting 30mph limits on the tiny derestricted lanes within the three settlements mentioned, the plan was to introduce them, accompanied by hideous red gateways, on the main A38 going past these villages, where few properties facing onto the road. The Agency was hoping that only supporters of this kind of thing would attend the meeting and that readers of the leaflet would not realise what they were up to.

I resolved that drastic action was necessary, and visited the local pub, where the landlord said he had spoken to 300 people and 299 were against the scheme. Buoyed by this I had 3000 leaflets printed and delivered over 2000 of them to local properties within a fortnight.

50 people contacted me in support of my campaign, and both I and my colleague spoke on the local radio station. Only four messages were in favour of the scheme — two from non-driving old ladies with genuine concerns who received polite replies, one was an abusive and anonymous scrawl telling me to leave the area if I didn't like it. The fourth was an abusive and aggressive phone call from a woman who lived in one of eight houses located on a bend — and she admitted to being stopped by the police in Kempsey doing 50mph! When I went to see her, I had a whole posse of residents shouting at me on the pavement, one coming up with the classic "a drunk crashed here at 90mph, so we want a 30mph limit."

The real source of their frustration was the Highways Agency, who had, the first

woman admitted, refused to carry out the necessary engineering improvements to separate the houses and parked cars from the road and so make the bend safe for these residents. Unfortunately, she was not the sort you can reason with and had already made up her mind about me, despite not even having read my leaflet.

The local press reported these events impartially but sensationally as "Villagers at war over speed limits", but the editorial was totally biased in support of the scheme, with the editor refusing three separate

"This shambles on the part of the so called Highways Agency shows that those we have entrusted with the custody of our road network will stop at nothing to get their horrid schemes implemented."

invitations to come see for himself! On talking to the paper at the end of the consultation period, the reporter said that the Highways Agency man had admitted that a majority of the respondents were opposed to the scheme and that, should this remain the case, they would not go ahead. The consultation was, therefore, to be extended another week!

Finally, in October, I received a call from BBC Radio Hereford and Worcester asking for my comments on the revised scheme — the Highways Agency had told the press what they were going to do before responding to concerned local people, and, of course, the pro-scheme people were all over the local paper before I even knew what was happening.

It turned out the scheme was going ahead pretty much as planned, except with the addition of speed cameras to be placed in locations "to be agreed with the local police".

The only significant victory was that the limit on the dangerous bend was now to be reduced to 40 not 30mph and that on the much longer stretch past the other two villages was to be 50 not 30mph — but Kempsey was still to be 30mph and all the horrible red tarmac would stay. Garish reflective signs would be even bigger to accommodate the camera signs, making it even more likely that pedestrians would be invisible to drivers blinded by reflections.

This shambles on the part of the so called Highways Agency shows that those we have entrusted with the custody of our road network will stop at nothing to get their schemes implemented. If the majority oppose them they just ignore them and claim, as a County Councillor did, that their spokesman (the only one prepared to publicly stand up to intimidation and abuse from both the local paper and frustrated residents) is a "lone voice".

As we go to press, the scheme is being implemented ... but remember the Newbury bypass, where Swampy & Co lost a bitter battle but won their war against other similar projects. It is always worth fighting back.

Whilst *On The Road* is the only way the ABD can keep in touch with *all* its members, our mailing list, *abdml*, helps those with internet access to discuss things on a daily basis. Unfortunately, only around 10% of our members subscribe to it.

Quite a few members joined *abdml* but subsequently unsubscribed due to the number of messages generated each day (anything upto a couple of dozen emails may appear, depending on what's happening at the time). What many people don't realise is that it's possible to subscribe to *abdml* but receive only one message each day. It's not as daft as it sounds, because as a subscriber it's possible to view the archives on the OneList website (<http://www.onelist.com/group/abdml>). The website also allows you to opt to receive all of a day's messages as a digest (just one e-mail containing all the messages).

In an attempt to be able to contact as many members as quickly as possible, an additional mailing list *abd-action* was set up. This is restricted to time-critical and important items only. We also send 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.

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 purely 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 a call for members to contact the BBC's *Panorama*, suggesting there could have been more balance in their 'road safety' programme.

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 national and local level.

So if you have e-mail, please join *abd-action*. Send an e-mail to abd-action-owner@onelist.com

To join *abdml* and *abd-action*, please send a message to abdml-owner@onelist.com (we ask all *abdml* subscribers to subscribe to *abd-action* as well to simplify administration).

In your subscription request please state clearly: your e-mail address, name, and membership number.

We also have a third mailing list, "*abdchat*", which was intended to take some of the general chat away from *abdml*. This has not been entirely successful, but our thanks must go to member Lance K. Green for his efforts to encourage others to use it by example!

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

The purpose of the ABD is to express and promote the drivers' viewpoint in those corridors of power where, all too often, people making decisions forget they use cars themselves, and fail to appreciate the true causes of many of the travel problems people face in these crowded islands. Our spokespeople do a great job — see the Media Report for details — but they are too often a single voice in a mass of unbelievers. The more active is the membership, the more effective are the spokespeople.

In this internet age in particular, it would be a great thing if on selected critical issues relevant to the great mass of car users on the roads, the membership backed up the Association and its spokespeople. They can do this by writing and/or emailing the key people in politics, the media, other motoring organisations, industry, business, etc.

The Association can facilitate this by publishing contact details for 'targets' — especially email addresses — and by providing pro-forma letters for members and non-members (via the web-site, perhaps) to use.

John Richardson

My wife is an infant school headteacher. I asked her recently what formal attempts there are nowadays to teach road safety in schools. Her answer — none! She said that whatever the school chooses to do is entirely off its own bat, and that there are no initiatives whatsoever from Government — local or national. She says there's a *huge* problem with danger to kids on the way to the school where she works (it's on an exceptionally rough estate) but that the problem doesn't stem from poor driving; it's through poor parenting. Many of the kids at the school (who are all under seven) walk to school by themselves, despite efforts on the part of the school to persuade parents not to allow this. The parents, who are generally a little 'uncivilised', make little or no attempt to teach safety or traffic awareness to the children. Whatever happened to the Tufty Club and the Green Cross Code?

Ten years ago, speed humps and traffic calming were introduced on the estate. I asked my wife if they had affected the casualty rate, and her answer was an emphatic 'yes' — they have apparently had a massive effect on reducing injuries.

So it would appear that drivers have to be asked to trundle around at 20mph because we can't be bothered, as a society, to teach our children road sense or to make parents responsible for the actions of their children! I have particularly strong views on parents' responsibilities towards their children.

My wife's view on the traffic calming and

20 mph limits is that they are a necessary evil on estates such as the one where her school is, as we can't be bothered to increase childrens' and parents' awareness of road safety.

Alan Wesson

Over the last few years I have watched with dismay and a degree of disbelief as authorities in areas that do not affect me have introduced ridiculously low speed limits. I've read all the comments about 'eco-fascist councils', the 'nanny state' etc.

The problem has just arrived in my back yard. The Congleton and Cheshire Joint Highways Committee is proposing the following. A main through route near a high school currently has a 40mph limit. Highways officers says that the road is wide, has good visibility and is suited to this limit. The average speed is 39.6mph and there have been no injury accidents in the last 3 years. They (along with the police, unofficially) recommend no change.

The Committee Chairwoman says that it is a rat run, and as it is close to a school it qualifies as a special case. She claims that the recommendations are actually Government guidelines which "tell us we should aim at 20 mph around schools, and all we are asking for is 30 mph".

Local residents welcome the idea of speed humps on the approach to their estate.

I understand that Highway Officers are rather unhappy and wondering why they are employed. They do their reports, write their recommendations, and are then totally ignored. The police have similar feelings of dissatisfaction. This trend threatens to wreck the county strategy of uniformity in the setting of speed limits and the siting of cameras.

There have, apparently, been efforts to run symposiums for the elected members to try to educate them on the facts of road safety and highways legislation. Most don't even attend, and many of those that do, ignore what they are told.

Apparently a 'high quality' A-road in the north of Cheshire (I do not know which one) is about to drop from 60mph to 40mph, against the advice of the council officers and police.

Forget the 'eco-fascist councils', the 'nanny state' etc. In Cheshire at least the damage is being done by a few severely misguided

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.

elected members exercising their powers in an effort to get publicity and win votes. The council officers, and even the saner among the elected county councillors, are powerless to stop these district councillors. It's got to be done on an extremely local level by people who vote for them.

But how? They've got 'speed kills' on their side. Short, catchy and to the point. A learned paper on TRL323 hasn't got the same impact. 'No it doesn't' also has its shortcomings as an argument. And even if I knew a catchy, to the point argument I don't have any contacts living in the area prepared to present them. Or even to invite me in to speak for them. This seems to defeat conventional lobbying.

Like the council officers I am, at present, a shade unhappy. Any ideas anyone?

Dave Hammond

I recently attended a session of Northamptonshire County Council's Examination in Public of its structure plan where county-wide transport was discussed. The usual suspects from environmental, cycling, local community and developers' lobbies were present.

The gem I picked up was with regard to the attitude of the representative of the Friends of the Earth towards railways. Much of the deliberation of the meeting had been concerned with rail improvements and plans by Railtrack to build new stations, one to the south of Northampton was to be an ambitious "multimodal interchange", improvement of existing stations and a widening of destinations. The sums to be spent will run into millions of pounds.

The FoE representative made an extraordinary statement claiming that railways are not as kind to the environment as they are alleged to be and that the money would be better spent on other transport facilities in which walking and cycling were given emphasis. He went on to say that a frequently used railway track can have a major impact on the surrounding environment and that the equivalent railway passenger miles per gallon of diesel are of the same order as a diesel car with a single occupant. He cited specific figures in which the energy from electricity at its source of generation or diesel directly consumed by locomotives as passenger miles per gallon of diesel. He made no reference to assumptions regarding passenger loadings which makes the figure

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**



for the Underground all the more remarkable when loadings at peak times are considered — like the trains are so full that you can't get on them.

In view of this statement, it appears that cars aren't so bad — especially with more than one occupant and powered two-wheelers are positively paragons of virtue. Presumably FoE's point is that we should walk and cycle everywhere and that accommodation, employment, shopping and leisure facilities should all be within a five mile radius.

Trevor Magner

Bryan Barton's long winded letter (issue 32) about advanced driving organisations completely failed to address the main issue in the letter he was responding to. This was that a self-proclaimed "advanced motorist" was waxing lyrical about various anti-car measures planned by local authorities in the West Midlands.

Exactly which organisation he belonged to is irrelevant. Turkeys, particularly advanced ones, do not vote for Christmas!

Steve Dommett

I visited the Millennium Dome recently, and I was rather concerned at the number of boxes inviting people to vote on environment and transport issues, the results of which were flashed up on big screens. These were the usual "would you leave your car at home if..." type of thing. What worries me is what the information is going to be used for.

The boxes had cards to insert for yes or no. As there was no clear indication whether one's vote had registered most people were inserting them a number of times, sometimes even trying them the opposite way round!

Most of the voters were children playing around again inserting at random.

There is no way any sensible conclusions could be drawn from this fiasco. No doubt somebody will claim the results to be representative of public opinion as they weren't coming out in favour of drivers.

There was also an ongoing talk on the effects of car use with a model of Edinburgh on display showing traffic flow. Similar questions were being asked with participants invited to press yes or no buttons. One was given only a few seconds to consider the answer. I struggled even with my knowledge and interest in the issues. As this zone (journey) was sponsored by Ford hopefully the info won't be used for the wrong purposes although Ben Plowden (Pedestrians Association) had lots of quotes posted around.

Dave Razzell

Probably only 20% of motorists are enthusiasts, while the remaining 80% just want convenient public transport. While the 20% may see the flaws in the Government's thinking, it's the 80% the ABD must appeal to.

Most of our population have swallowed the 'control the car' arguments, but we simply need to use the roads more efficiently — not choke them with traffic calming junk and speed limits that an Edwardian driver would recognise.

Road safety should be on the national curriculum — do you ever see road safety items on children's TV any more?

Governments rely on apathy, which we are surrounded by. We must talk to, educate and argue with those around us.

If there are any members who would like to get in touch with me, please do so through the channels below. I have volunteered to become the regional contact for Kent, and would be pleased to hear from any members who would like to campaign on local issues.

Terry Hudson
8 Sussex Gardens
Herne Bay
Kent CT6 8DU
01227 374 680

Any members who live in Essex or surrounding area may be aware that Brentwood Borough Council has just introduced some new 30 mph speed limits on roads which previously had 40 or even 60 mph limits. I discovered one of them about ten days ago and was so incensed by the absurdity of the limit for the road in question (the A1023)

that I sent a quite aggressive letter to the council. I have now had a reply, which makes a very poor attempt at justification. It admits that the advice in the relevant guidelines was ignored, that the main reason for the new limits was the number of complaints from residents and that the police had objected to many of the limits!

The letter ends by saying that it is proposed to report my views and those of other motorists to council members at some unspecified time in the future. I suggest that anyone who knows the area writes in, so that there is the greatest possible volume of protests against these absurd new limits. The address to write to is:

Mr P W Rose
Brentwood Borough Council
Council Offices Ingrave Road
Brentwood
Essex, CM15 8AY

Malcolm Heymer

The current obsession with speed restrictions culminated in no fewer than three television programmes on one night (Monday 14th February).

One of these was Panorama, a disgraceful saga of emotional blackmail, featuring a number of distraught parents whose children had been killed or badly injured as pedestrians. The suggestion was made that everyone should drive at no more than 20mph to prevent these tragedies in the future.

The whole thrust of the first part of the programme was the anguish of the bereaved families, including footage of a funeral cortege — but no real analysis of the real causes of these injuries and fatalities. Even Tony Blair spoke on the subject, saying we must protect our children — but saying nothing of educating drivers, parents or children.

Panorama's treatment of this subject could hardly be described as balanced, and it was disappointing to find that the programme did not include any contribution from the ABD on this occasion.

Peter Horton

Mark McArthur-Christie spent a great deal of time with Roger Harrabin, putting the ABD's message across. Harrabin agreed with what we had to say, but claimed he was only a reporter — he had no control over the way the programme was put together.

Despite lengthy interviews being filmed, Mark didn't appear in the programme. It seems his points didn't fit in with what the film makers wanted to say. That's BBC objectivity for you, and it's not the first time this has happened.

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!



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 Dommett PO Box 3151 West Bergholt CO6 3JH

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. 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.

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.

You'll notice from the appearances below that the ABD is no longer seen as an organisation that exists to allow drivers to whizz about everywhere with no sense of responsibility. Driver training, the environment and public transport are core issues that the ABD is involved in — and this is now being recognised by areas of the media who previously were very biased against us.

Hugh Bladon has had a busy month, appearing in local media around the country. The Lowestoft local press wanted an interview on fuel costs, while BBC Radio Leeds put Hugh up with Paul Ripley to talk about the proposed increase in the minimum age at which it is permissible to take a driving test.

Hugh did a lengthy interview on BBC Southern Counties Radio about global warming and pollution. This proved an excellent opportunity to discuss some of the wider issues, such as the fact that by imposing driver-unfriendly measures, pollution rates will go up. Traffic calming and parking space reduction lead to people driving around for longer, thus increasing emissions.

A 15-minute slot on Alan Clifford's motoring section (BBC Radio Nottingham) gave Hugh the opportunity to give the ABD's contact details out — after he'd given chapter and verse on why GPS speed limiters on cars are not the panacea they would at first appear to be. As usual listeners were surprised to hear that there was another side to the *speed kills* debate. What a shame we don't have more enlightened presenters such as Alan Clifford.

As well as speaking to the media, ABD spokespeople have given talks to IAM groups around the country. Mark McArthur-Christie recently addressed the Lichfield IAM group, who were very receptive to our ideas — just like the Bath, Warrington, Worcester, Solihull and numerous other groups have been.

Mark also spoke at great length to Roger Harrabin for the Panorama programme on road safety. Despite Roger going as far as saying he would join the ABD, Mark's comments weren't used.

Hugh Bladon spent a day with a BBC film crew talking about inappropriate speed cameras. After filming for hours they were

rather chuffed with their story — then decided not to use it.

Tony Vickers spent a long time talking to a BBC contact about problems — and possible solutions — with transport in London. Despite unbridled enthusiasm for using the ABD in their programme, the BBC decided not to use any of our comments.

Bearing these examples in mind, don't think that because the ABD isn't being represented in certain sections of the media, we're not doing our best to put the driver's point of view forward at every opportunity.

It's most unfortunate, but with the lack of balance we see in many sections of today's media it has got to the point where we have to be on the defensive, frightened of being misrepresented at every opportunity.

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 February

Teachers face environmental indoctrination

21st February

Anti-speed protesters are misguided

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.

<http://www.ukpol.co.uk/email.shtml>

A useful site if you want to find contact details for an MP

<http://www.vision.net.au/~daly/>

Want to know all about global warming?

This site dispels a few of the popular misconceptions about an often misunderstood subject

<http://www.parkingticket.co.uk>

If you want to find out about parking regulations, this should be your first port of call — especially as it's been set up by ABD member John Squires

<http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~cavok/hump.html>

<http://www.io.com/~bumper/ada.htm>

Sites devoted to campaigning against road humps. The first is British, the second is American.