

The alternatives to speed cameras

Geoff Luxford, a chartered engineer, says those who really want safer roads should look at the alternatives to speed cameras (from: <https://conservativehome.com/2010/08/12/the-alternatives-to-speed-cameras/>)

Most drivers and riders support sensible and reasonable efforts to improved road safety, but many are aggrieved by the way they are indiscriminately targeted for minor speeding infringements while driving perfectly safely and as lawfully as they reasonably can.

Often they are targeted in conditions where a moderate excess speed, over an arbitrary limit, is of no danger to anyone, where the police know this but just take advantage and abuse their powers. This can be to increase the tally of convictions; to meet targets and quotas and obtain the revenue needed to support these activities. This contributes nothing to road safety, which is the supposed reason for this speed enforcement.

It brings the police into disrepute, with alienated drivers no longer willing to support the police, with the adverse consequences for serious criminal activity. We all recognise there are some who drive at quite excessive, even dangerous, speeds for the conditions. It is then reasonable to expect the police to take the necessary steps against such drivers, sometimes even using speed cameras, but that is often the least effective method, which does nothing to discourage or control other dangerous driving behaviour.

The trouble is that once a speed camera is set up, or installed, to gain maximum revenue the police then use it trawl in as many convictions as they can, from ordinary drivers and bikers who are of no danger to anyone. All too often speed is wrongly blamed for causing accidents and fatalities, when in it is, in reality, only a minor contributory factor.

Obviously speed is a factor in nearly all accidents, since few stationary vehicles cause accidents, but speed is an essential part of effective transport. The primary contributory factors to serious accidents tends to be "Failing to look", "Loss of control", "Reckless, in a hurry", "Pedestrians not looking", "Poor judgement" and "Poor manoeuvre", which are typically about 50% of the contributory factors, some 14 times more than speeding (2007 data).

As a recent investigation has shown, carefully targeted improvements to road layout and signage can be far more cost effective and beneficial to road safety than yet more speed restrictions enforced with evermore speed cameras. Well targeted simple, relatively inexpensive engineering measures have reduced fatal and serious collisions by more than 70% on the worst ten roads. Improvements to signing and markings, anti-skid resurfacing and the layout and signing of junctions were common features in achieving this. (UK's 'most improved roads, BBC News, 30/06/10).

Yet still the first choice of many authorities is to implement speed reductions and enforcement, with little proper consideration whether this will be beneficial, or if other measures would have been more cost effective. As a result traffic and transport is needlessly further impeded with further economic cost to the country, for very little, if any, road safety benefit.

A typical example is the A149 in Norfolk, Potter Heigham to Wayford, which has seen ever more speed reductions, now enforced with average speed cameras (New Norfolk speed cameras, EDP, 19/03/10), yet other simple safety improvements, such as repainting worn out white lines, repairing the road surface and improving signs have been neglected.

Now these speed cameras are there, it won't matter what the conditions are, how quiet the road is or the time of day, anyone moderately exceeding the speed limit, however safe to do so, will be prosecuted for speeding, with no benefit to road safety.

The stupidity is these cameras cannot detect or prevent speeding, over short distances, so forcing any overtaking of slow vehicles to be at more dangerous locations, by the constraints these cameras impose. Hence they are unlikely to prevent the accidents for which they were supposedly installed. No doubt they will generate plenty of revenue, for their very substantial cost, and we can expect plenty of statistically irrelevant bogus propaganda about their safety benefits.