

The Alliance of British Drivers



Potential Road Safety dichotomies between current Speed Enforcement and Localism Policies

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The Association of British Drivers, 17/10/2011.**

Speed Limit Setting:

- The casualty-reducing value of speed limit setting and enforcement - particularly when the limits set and enforced are unrealistically low - have been substantially overstated by some elements of the UK road safety industry
- One might observe, some would say cynically, that the elements propounding this approach are coincidentally the very ones with the most to gain financially from the rigid enforcement of unrealistically low speed limits.
- Only around 3-5% of road traffic accidents have speed which is both illegal and inappropriate for the prevailing conditions as a primary precipitating factor
- Accidents of this type exhibit a preponderance of perpetrators who are seriously impaired by alcohol and/or drug consumption. They are often also serially-disqualified offenders, driving uninsured, poorly-maintained vehicles - or even ones taken without the owner's consent.
- Such offenders are not in any way deterred or influenced by automated speed enforcement; and instead require targeted intervention by intelligence-led police patrolling to rid our roads of them.
- If we subtract this 5% of essentially dangerous driver accidents; and the additional, small number which are precipitated by mechanical defects; then there are two root causes of the vast majority of road accidents - misjudgement and inattention (per A.C Gullon ^{1,2}). Certain evidence now seems to suggest that some drivers may be predisposed to attention-deficient driving behaviour & will substitute various kinds of distraction up to their chosen personal thresh-hold.³
- Responsible road users are entitled to speed limit setting and enforcement policies which are rational and consistent across all classes of road; and whose sole aims are to maximise road user safety, consistent with the minimum impact on individual freedom of movement.
- Speed limits should actually be applied to work in concert with sound driver judgement, not against it.
- So applied, they reinforce and encourage good driver judgement and improve attention by involving the driver in speed management.
- If they are not, then they undermine sound judgement and reduce driver involvement; encouraging inattention.
- Speed limits also need to change in the right places, and not be extended to satisfy one outlying resident who wants to be "brought in". This is because speed management is about moderating speed in response to road conditions, not about setting any particular speed. Consequently:
- Local speed limits on rural roads should only be set where the hazard density warrants it; and not as a blanket measure on the (often mistaken) assumption that lower average speeds automatically lead to fewer accidents⁴.
- The only method capable of delivering these aims is by setting speed limits on specific roads according to the speed range of the "pace" drivers (those travelling at the 80th to 90th percentile speeds under freeflow conditions) - i.e., according to 85th Percentile Principles.
- Setting speed limits using this method delivers maximum compliance at minimum casualty rates. Any departure from this approach results in increased casualty rates and a deterioration in compliance.
- This method requires speed distribution studies of vehicles travelling unconstrained under freeflow conditions to be carried out; & their results used to set the safest speed limit (at the level of the 85th percentile speed).
- These limits must then be enforced rationally and with common sense - but without fear or favour - by the Police Service.

Potential Conflict with the “Localism” Agenda:

- Such a rational, scientifically-based approach as the above is highly unlikely to emerge from inexperienced local politicians knee-jerk reacting to local pressures for "something to be done" to improve road safety. Indeed the reverse is likely to be the case
- The localism agenda must not be allowed to proceed at the expense of compromising road safety.

Enforcement Policy:

- Many speed camera partnerships (supported by ACPO Ltd) are proposing to offer large numbers of defendants who might otherwise be convicted of speed-related offences - & hence receive penalty points and fines - the alternative of higher-cost Speed Awareness Courses.
- The camera partnerships receive back from the course provider a proportion of these course fees - which are used to offset partnership running costs
- There is a conflict of interests inherent to these financial arrangements. This runs contrary to the principle of the Separation of Powers. The speed camera partnerships should have no financial interest in the enforcement process.
- This clearly is NOT the case; & there is at the very least very evident perceived conflict of interest; in terms of the levels at which speed limits are likely to be set and in the execution of the enforcement process
- It will clearly be in the camera partnerships' interests to have limits set as far below 85th percentile levels as possible to generate high levels of non-compliance; producing high numbers of speed-related offenders (the vast majority of whom are driving quite safely according to 85th percentile principles); but who will nevertheless either be prosecuted or offered places on Speed Awareness Courses (from which the camera partnerships derive pecuniary advantage)
- Not only is this ethically questionable, but also setting sub-85th percentile speed limits is suboptimal for road safety
- In relation to the prosecution of speed-related offences, the Police should retain their customary discretion; and only prosecute road users whose use of speed can be shown to have been unsafe, taking into account all the circumstances under which the alleged offence took place.

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1. A.C. "Al" Gullon B.Sc, P.Eng.; 6ITS London Paper#1916 (AMPS and black boxes)
 2. Traffic Safety Paper given by A.C. "Al" Gullon B.Sc, P.Eng, at: International Specialised Exhibition-Forum ROAD, Moscow, Russia: <http://www.ertico.com/road-2010-22-25-november-2010-moscow-russia>.
 3. For the reasoning behind this view, refer to the ABD's critique of the spurious TRL511 1mph=5% accident reduction relationship (www.abd.org.uk/onemph.htm and www.abd.org.uk/trl511.htm).
 4. 3 See e.g.,: <http://www.iihs.org/news/rss/pr012910.html>; http://www.iihs.org/research/topics/pdf/HLDI_Cellphone_Bulletin_Dec09.pdf; http://www.iihs.org/presentations/IIHS_2010-29-1.pdf.