Wandsworth Cycling Campaign
www.wandsworthcyclists.org.uk

Wandsworth Cycling Campaign
Submission to the GLA's Consultation on the Impact of Speed Humps

We are pleased to have the opportunity to submit a response to the above consultation.

Wandsworth Cycling Campaign (WCC) is the local group of the London Cycling Campaign in the London Borough of Wandsworth. WCC has 520 members and represents a group of people of all backgrounds and a range of ages with an interest in promoting cycling in Wandsworth. Our primary interest is in promoting cycling as a practical mode of transport – that is, utility cycling. We have a website (www.wandsworthcyclists.org.uk) and have had an e-mail discussion group for the past three years, which is open to anyone with an interest in cycling in Wandsworth to join. This e-mail group is very active, with 75 members, and provides an excellent forum for sharing ideas, information, proposals, knowledge and experience.

We bring to our submission practical first-hand knowledge of urban cycling in London. Many WCC members also drive, walk and use public transport, and so have first-hand experience of the impact of speed humps from a variety of perspectives.

Overview

Many different views on speed humps were expressed by our members but the over-riding feeling was that anything to reduce speeds, and the associated current high levels of aggressive driving that members experience on a daily basis, would be a good thing.

There is substantial evidence to link speed with an increased chance of death or serious injury in a road accident, whether involving motor vehicles, cyclists or pedestrians. Negative effects of speed humps noted by our members were largely material, i.e. they related to car and property damage and the consequential cost, but the positive effects were largely human.

However, there is recognition that speed humps are not a total solution and that good design of these and other traffic calming measures is crucial to optimising travelling conditions for all road users and residents. Furthermore, many members have expressed the need to find a longer term technological solution to monitor and control speed more effectively. A system that goes further than the rather simplistic measure of making the journey less comfortable is regarded as preferable.

It is important to emphasise that reducing speed is more than just an attempt to reduce deaths, important though that is. Speed is intimidating and has the effect of making the streets, which are a public space, feel more like no-go areas rather than a place where people can choose to walk to the shops or to work, to each others' homes, or where children can feel safe going to school. In short the streets are not just for motor vehicles, they are everyone's environment. If that is poor, the quality of our daily lives will be diminished. If cycling and walking as a means of transport are to be encouraged, the streets need to be made a more pleasant place to be.

1. What is your experience of the effectiveness of road humps in preventing and reducing the number of fatal injuries and traffic collisions?

Speed humps do reduce vehicle speeds. Since speed is a major factor in determining whether a pedestrian or cyclist survives a collision, anything that reduces speed is a step in the right

direction. Some have claimed that speed humps are a distraction at a time when drivers should be looking out for 'unexpected children', but as one of our members points out:

"I agree that drivers should be looking out for unexpected children. But surely the reason for the existence of speed humps is precisely that drivers don't seem to expect the unexpected."

The reason speed is a problem is that when the unexpected happens, drivers are often unable to react fast enough to prevent an accident. Slower speeds give drivers more thinking and braking time, as well as making the consequences of collision less severe for vulnerable road users.

2. Do Speed Humps affect delivery of emergency services?

There has been a claim that speed humps are actually "killing Londoners" by delaying ambulances (Murphy, J; 2003). This unsubstantiated claim by Sigurd Reinton, Chairman of the London Ambulance Service, needs to be seen in a wider context, namely that fewer ambulance call-outs would be necessary if speeds were reduced, in turn reducing the number of road accidents. Fire appliances, being larger vehicles, may be slowed but as field tests by Atkins and Coleman (1997) demonstrate, the numbers of house fires have declined greatly in recent years whilst the number of traffic crashes continue to be a major cause of death. As Atkins and Coleman note, this translates into a "net safety benefit".

Furthermore, Mr Reinton makes a particular reference to cardiac arrests. It is known that even relatively low levels of exercise, such as cycling or walking to work instead of driving, can have a significant impact on whether an individual develops heart disease. It should also be noted that in the West End of London emergency personnel are now using bicycles to reach cardiac arrest patients more quickly.

3. Do speed humps damage residential properties?

This question is somewhat outside the remit of WCC. Although anecdotal evidence seems to confirm that motor vehicles, particularly vans and lorries, travelling at speed over speed humps may cause buildings to shake, WCC believe that this is more as a consequence of excessive speed than the speed humps themselves. Reduced motorised traffic levels and an attention to speed would prevent serious problems. Detailed research has been conducted which confirms that the presence of speed humps per se, does not in fact pose a problem to building structures (TRL, 2000).

4. Do speed humps increase air and noise pollution?

Whilst motor vehicles travelling at speed are noisier and may pollute more than slow moving ones, hard braking and accelerating is often perceived as worse on both fronts. Once again, though, we feel this is more an issue of driving attitudes than a particular problem of speed humps. Smooth driving at speeds appropriate to the road, such as 20mph in narrow residential roads, is the best option. Once again good design of the entire traffic calming environment is key to achieving effective results, namely to reduce speeds and the associated increased likelihood of crashes. This needs to be combined with education of motorists and strict enforcement of speed limits.

5. Do speed humps increase congestion in residential areas?

It is unclear how the presence of speed humps can increase congestion, unless congestion is defined as one motor vehicle having to go slower behind another. It has been recognised that motorway queues often develop as a result of a large number of vehicles all travelling at high speed too close together. As one slows, each following vehicle brakes slightly harder and the resulting 'concertina' effect brings the whole motorway to a standstill. The introduction of variable speed limits on some sections of the M25 have alleviated this problem, suggesting that lower

speeds can actually prevent congestion. It would therefore seem that speed humps can decrease congestion by encouraging drivers to travel more smoothly and calmly.

6. Do cars try to make up time by speeding between zones?

Yes, although once again this is down to poor driver attitudes, namely that saving a few seconds on their journey is more important than driving safely with consideration for other road users. However, it seems likely that these same antisocial drivers would drive at a constantly high speed if speed humps slowing their progress were removed, a situation which is considered far worse by our members. This demonstrates that, although speed humps are an imperfect solution to excessive speeds and aggressive driving, they are generally better than nothing at all. This is particularly the case as police enforcement is currently inadequate.

7. Do speed humps damage cars?

Possibly, but only if driven over at speed. What is more, this damage is insignificant compared to the injury done to a pedestrian or cyclist hit by a car. Research has shown that at 35mph you are twice as likely to kill someone as you are at 30mph (DETR, 1999). Already 90% of pedestrians hit by a car traveling at 30mph will be seriously injured. Nearly half of them will be killed (DETR, 2000b). The change from mainly survivable injuries to mainly fatal injuries takes place at speeds of between 30 and 40mph (Ashton, 1981).

8. Are there any alternative cost effective measures to speed humps and if so, which measures would you favour?

The most commonly quoted option in our consultation was speed limiters controlled by road-side devices, although most are aware that the technology may still be at the early stages, expensive and some years away. Enforcement, or lack of it, was of particular concern to our members, one of whom notes:

Speed humps are required in London as nobody is out on the roads enforcing the speed limit. I lived in Western Australia for a few years where a much more proactive approach was taken to speeding. One of the most effective techniques was the use of mobile speed cameras (multi-novas). You never knew where they were going to be and as a result had to be constantly aware of your speed.

There was also a feeling that speeding in this country is not currently considered as antisocial and unacceptable as, say, drink driving. With speed being a factor in 1 in 3 accidents, speeding needs to be addressed not only by the general public but also by the relevant authorities. The recent move to make speed cameras highly visible is absurd, as drivers simply learn where the cameras are and slow down for them, speeding as normal between them. This same attitude applies to speed humps where drivers speed in between because they believe that the responsibility to control speed has been lifted from them and passed to the designers of the road environment.

Other traffic calming measures include the use of chicanes, road narrowing and cobbles, but these all have detrimental effects on cycling. Anything that narrows the road is potentially dangerous to cyclists as motorists have a tendency to squeeze past pushing cyclists against the kerb.

Conclusion

Speed humps are a cost-effective way of reducing vehicle speeds. It has already been shown that a reduction in motor vehicle speed is crucial if there is to be a reduction in the numbers of serious injuries and deaths on London's roads. New technologies may eventually offer more effective ways of calming traffic, but until then speed humps should remain in place, and introduced as necessary. They are easily removed if an alternative is found.

It has been noted that some drivers have learned to drive more sensibly due to the presence of speed humps, which demonstrates that they do work. A broad education process, encompassing not only speed but also the general antisocial nature of aggressive driving, needs to be considered in order to raise awareness of the need to behave responsibly on the roads. Speed humps do help, but they cannot provide a total solution.

Good design is an extremely important element of making speed humps work for everyone and it is hoped that those planning any future schemes would consult with the relevant community groups, such as pedestrians and residents, as well as cyclists, to help create an environment where everyone can travel and live side by side. It is also important to learn from prior experience so that future traffic calming schemes can be appropriately designed to maximise access to roads particularly to environmentally friendly and health promoting modes of transport such as cycling and walking. Roads are a public space and should be considered in that light.

References:

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