

Britain's roads are crumbling

The annual review of road conditions throughout the country carried out by the Institute of Civil Engineers makes grim reading. The report says that Britain's local road network is nearing crisis point due to lack of maintenance and repair. Nearly £5 billion needs to be spent to overcome the backlog of maintenance. The backlog rose by 20% for the second successive year with unclassified roads identified as being in the worst state of repair. The report goes on to say that local authorities frequently appear to have diverted funds provided by government in the Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for road maintenance to support spending on what they consider to be "front line" services, that is those with greater political prominence and voter appeal, such as education and social services.

Funds sanctioned and in some cases provided by central government for investment in local transport have approximately halved in real terms over the past six years. The British Road Federation has attacked the government for failing to provide adequate funding to local authorities for outstanding road maintenance work. BRF director, Richard Diment, went on to say: "The government has said that more resources for transport would be made available to local authorities. The reality is that the amount has been reduced and while certain items such as road maintenance have been increased it is less than one third of the amount required by the local authorities to start making an impact on the massive backlog." By contrast, Friends of the Earth transport campaigner, Tony Bosworth, is reported to have said: "This is excellent news, by spending much more on measures to provide real alternatives to car use, the government has got it right."

The problem is that this is not a straight line deterioration; the poor condition of the roads will accelerate as weather penetrates damaged surfaces which, when combined with the effects of traffic, will affect the foundations of the roads. What will it take before those in authority realise that the taxes to fund their precious "services" come ultimately from the real economy and that requires an efficient road network.

Drivers are paying £32 billion per year in motoring related taxes in addition to whatever other taxes they have to pay as citizens of the UK. Yet the Government is not prepared even to maintain the existing road network, let alone build new roads.

Thought for the day

"We must learn to measure what is important rather than make important what can be measured"

Radio 4's Thought for the Day, from the Bishop of Southwark

"24,000 early deaths" scare exposed

The "24,000 early deaths" are in fact the deaths, pulled forward by a few days, of already chronically sick and dying people. They are not the premature deaths of healthy individuals as implied. The report does not show evidence that these earlier deaths are caused by the variations in pollution, only that there is a weak link based on numerous disparate statistical studies which may or may not successfully take into account other complex variables such as the weather which could simultaneously account for both the early deaths and the variations in pollution.

The figures are estimates based on extrapolation of these studies to the whole of Britain. This process is fraught with inaccuracies and there is no comparison of the answer this process generates with actual death rates. This means the figures produced are subject to errors so large the report writers dare not quantify them.

Most tellingly, the only pollutants which are claimed to pull forward deaths are particulates (buses and lorries), sulphur dioxide (industry) and ozone (secondary pollutant broken down by NOx and so lower in high traffic areas). The primary petrol car pollutants, nitrogen dioxide, carbon monoxide and hydrocarbons are not found to have a reliably measurable effect in the concentrations in which they are found.

Bus lane spies

A pilot scheme under way in London has video cameras mounted on the front of double-decker buses to monitor misuse of bus lanes. The camera is activated whenever the bus enters a bus lane and runs until the bus exits the lane. It therefore films everything in front of the bus for the duration of its time in the bus lane. The bus driver has no part in its operation. At the end of the day, the film can be viewed by the police and action taken on any bus lane trespassers.

Issue 23, February 1999

£2.00

Inside this issue

UK news, continued	2
Your letters	3
Pro-Motor News	4
The ABD needs You!	
The Last Laugh:	
It's not cricket	4

Insurance for cyclists

Car owner, Sam Willis, was awoken one night by a loud noise: he found a drunken cyclist spead-eagled across the bonnet of his parked car. He called an ambulance, as one would, but was later outraged to receive a hospital bill for the treatment of the cyclist. Apparently the law permits the hospital to bill the owner of a motor vehicle for emergency treatment regardless of blame. The insurers usually meet the bill but this does of course increase all our premiums.

John Gummer - defender of speed!

On 11 January, the Today Programme carried an item about the proposed banning of speedboats from Windermere by the Lake District National Park Authority. What was interesting about this was not necessarily the issue, but who was wheeled out to defend the rights of the powerboaters - none other than former Tory Environment Minister and arch Global Warming Theory believer John Gummer.

Even more surprising was that he did a very good job - lambasting the man from the Park Authority for failing to listen to or discuss matters with the powerboaters, and pointing out that this new restriction flew in the face of a previous deal which exchanged better powerboat facilities on Windermere, for which a grant had been paid, with a ban on powerboating on Coniston and Derwentwater. This sort of attitude from official bodies should sound familiar to anyone involved in road transport issues. But the most telling point from the suddenly reformed Mr Gummer was that sensible accommodations should be made for all to

Correction

The last issue gave the Highways Agency telephone number incorrectly. We apologise to members and to the QVC satellite home shopping channel whose number we gave in error.

The Highways Agency number is 0345 504030.

enjoy the countryside and that different users should show tolerance and respect for one another rather than trying to exclude one particular activity.

Well done, John! We couldn't agree more. Tell this to the Council for the Partition of Rural England, the newly militant Cyclists Touring Club, the Ramblers Association, the Horseriders and other groups trying to gang up on car drivers to make their lives as miserable in the countryside as it has become in the towns and on the motorways. These people can do what they like on the 98.4% of Britain's land area to which motor vehicles do not have access. On the roads, everyone must exercise a duty of care to themselves and other road users, and that applies to these groups who seem eager to absolve themselves of all responsibility for their own safety in a headlong rush to bash the motorist.

The crazy thing is that most of these activities, especially in National Parks like the Lake District, rely on road transport to get the participants and their equipment to the location. Orwell called this kind of attitude "doublethink" - we prefer hypocrisy.

White Cliffs collapse - Environment Agency blames climate change

A 200 yard section of Beachy Head recently fell into the sea - part of an ongoing process of coastal erosion that has been happening for eons. Of course, the Environment Agency has to get a dig in - blaming "bigger waves and higher sea levels" brought about by climate change. This was such obvious nonsense that even the Today Programme didn't fall for it, relegating this opinion to the brief mention that it barely deserved.

Cars fail to fail emissions test

All seven local authorities who set up roadside emissions checks have reported a loss in the first year of operation. The scheme was supposed to be self-financing, but so few cars have failed the tests that the local authorities have lost money.

The plan was to fine drivers £90 if their car failed the emissions test, reduced to £60 if they paid within 28 days. The biggest loser was Birmingham, who lost £35,800 of taxpayers' money. Out of 5381 cars stopped, only 235 were outside the limits. Despite the heavy bills and evidence there is no great problem with pollution by motorists, Labour councillors have decided to carry on with the twice-weekly roadside checks. "Despite us not breaking even, it has been successful" claimed environmental health chairman, Margaret Wells.

She continued: "It is more about sustainability than an attack on the car."

Whatever that is supposed to mean. Predictably Gavin Tringham, head of Birmingham City Council's Environmental Protection Unit (or should that be Racket?) denied the exercise had been a waste of money: "The government asked us to take part in a pilot scheme, and we, along with six other authorities, were delighted to take part". The other authorities taking part were Bristol (who recouped about half of its estimated £25,000 costs), Middlesborough, Canterbury, Westminster, Glasgow and Swansea.

W. Berks

Damon Green reports on an article published in the local press.

An article published in January's Newbury Weekly News on the issue of road accidents and casualties in West Berkshire dangerously confused road safety and speed related issues.

The 17 accidents at the A34 and M4 junction were attributed by Newbury Police to some drivers approaching the junction too fast and being unable to stop at the traffic lights. A perfectly logical deduction. Unfortunately the article then goes on to say "Speed is not just a problem on motorways and A roads" implying speed is the cause of the majority of the County's accidents. This is nonsense. Speed is not a problem on either of these roads. Motorways are by far the safest roads in the country yet have the highest speed limit.

Furthermore Mr Phil Schnepf, the council's highways manager, was quoted as saying road safety was a top priority for his department, yet West Berkshire have initiated a programme which will see 30mph limits established in all the areas villages over the next few years. How on earth can this improve road safety? There is no simple relationship between speed and accident rates. In Suffolk, 450 new 30mph limits were imposed in semi-rural and rural areas between 1995 and 1996 and fatalities rose by 17%. In Oxfordshire a similar scheme was bungled through, with speed cameras planted across the county. Fatalities increased by 30%.

Recent data on the causes of over 7600 rural road accidents over the 1988-92 period carried out by the AA Foundation for Road Safety Research and Cambridgeshire County Council shows that excessive speed (including that which is excessive for the prevailing road/weather conditions and the immediate road configuration, but is within the posted speed limit) was attributed as one of the causal factors in only 5.4% of the 7600 accidents surveyed. Blaming speed therefore fails to address the causes of 95% of road accidents, and goes a long way towards explaining why the UK's road safety record has ceased improving (and last year, actually marginally worsened versus 1996) since the Speed Kills campaign was instituted.

One can only hope, for all of our sakes, that West Berkshire Council can show some initiative and discard this preoccupation with

The Association of British Drivers

On The Road is published by Pro-Motor, a company limited by Guarantee and registered in England under no: 2945728.

For contact details see:
www.abd.org.uk/contacts.htm

New address, 'phone or e-mail?

Please notify the Secretary.
(See page 2 for details.)

speed, initiating instead a properly thought out road safety policy to take us safely into the next millennium.

Letters



CPRE hijacked

Sir - I was interested to read the press release on the ABD's web-site about the way the CPRE (of which I am a member) has been effectively hi-jacked by anti-car pressure groups. I wrote to Kate Parminter, the recently appointed Director of the CPRE, and received a reply from Paul Hamblin, Transport Policy Officer.

He gave a grudging acceptance of the role of motor transport, but in general (to a large extent) proves the point. The 40mph speed limit on unclassified roads is both impractical and unenforceable, but I fear (as you have pointed out) that it is only a stalking horse for a general 40mph limit on all single carriageway roads which is one of the prime long-term targets of anti-car campaigners.

It would be interesting if any ABD members have experiences of the enforceability of the 40mph speed limit on Dartmoor, which is a kind of pilot for this idea. I think it's significant that there are none of the repeater signs that are normally required for sub-60 limits on unlit roads.

Peter Edwardson, Stockport, Cheshire

VED proposals attacked

Sir - A Daily Telegraph report of 4th November on a consultation document on changes to car tax suggests higher tax on (currently exempt) pre-1973 cars "on the basis that older cars tend to be more polluting". This is nonsense.

Pollution caused by such cars relates more to correct maintenance and annual mileage than to year of manufacture. Recent USA experience has confirmed that properly maintained classics cause so little pollution that they have been exempted from tests. There can be no environmental justification for imposing higher tax rates on old cars covering only 2-3,000 a year than on younger cars covering ten times the mileage.

Those who own several old cars (but can drive only one at a time) already pay in proportion to mileage. Cars with large engines, especially older ones, already incur outrageous penalties at the petrol pump, without adding yet more whether they turn a wheel or not.

Just to declare my interest I have the following: a 1938 Alvis 3.5 litre (15mpg); a 1939 Alvis 4.3 litre (12mpg); a 1962 Bentley S2 Continental 6.2 litre (17mpg); a 1967 Jaguar E-type 4.2 litre (17mpg); and a 1989 Jaguar V12 Series 3 5.3 litre (16mpg).

But I can still only drive one at a time!

Idris Francis, Petersfield, Hampshire

Rules & regs

Sir - The recent discussions about bus lanes and number plates made me think about



Accident Blackspot? This gatso is on the A470 at Llanidloes (mid-Wales) and is at a junction where traffic for the town turns off. It is reversible - there being markings on both carriageways - and has often been covered by a black bin liner. There is never more than the odd car or van in this area, traffic always being extremely light - as the photo shows.

suggesting buying an old taxi or an old bus, but as I was not sure of the regulations I had a look through the highway code. I was surprised to find one or two clauses which are worth repeating here.

"53. Do not hold up a long queue of traffic. If you are driving a large or slow-moving vehicle and the road is narrow or winding, or there is a lot of traffic coming towards you, pull in where you can do so safely so that other vehicles can overtake."

Wouldn't you like to see the police enforce that one!

"82. Some roads (often called single-track roads) are only wide enough for one vehicle. They may have special passing places. Pull into a passing place on your left, or wait opposite a passing place on your right, when you see a vehicle coming towards you, or the driver behind you wants to overtake. Give way to vehicles coming uphill whenever you can. Do not park in passing places."

We all know about vehicles coming the other way, but vehicles behind wanting to overtake is something which could come in useful if tractor drivers etc could be educated.

Is using the right indicator sufficient notice that you want to overtake?

I didn't find much about bus lanes other than being only for "scheduled, school and work buses" so if you buy a second hand bus and drive it to work then presumably you are OK, but my car parking space isn't big enough, and the fuel costs too much so maybe I'll pass on that one.

There were many other rules which I knew of but which I see routinely broken - fog lights used in good visibility - people who drive right around a roundabout in the left hand lane - hazard warning lights used as an excuse for parking badly, particularly in a line of parked cars so it looks like they are indicating to pull out because you can't see that *both* indicators are flashing - not speeding up, and indeed slowing down to enable someone overtaking to pass and pull in - pulling back to the left after overtaking on a motorway.

Of all the good rules, why do the police concentrate on enforcing the one rule which is so bad that nearly every driver ignores it?

Roger Holmes.

Delta Computer Services

"Making the most of IT"

- Consultancy
- Training for computer users
- Documentation authoring and design
- Application development: database, spreadsheet, publishing and mailing systems etc.
- Uninterruptible power supplies (UPS)

☎ 01206 240120 <http://www.deltacom.co.uk>



The ABD needs You!

The ABD is run entirely by volunteers, almost all of whom have to fit ABD activities around full time jobs, or running their businesses. Not for us the full time sinecures at Local Authority Environment departments where the next blow to your freedom can be planned on a generous salary, or the dole cheques that those kind people at the DSS hand out to the parasites who try to obstruct the construction of the nation's vital infrastructure.

With a steadily rising membership, and with daily attacks on our freedom and wallets to be defended, the work involved is increasing fast. Whatever skills, facilities, professional knowledge - or simply enthusiasm - that you can contribute, the ABD will be more effective as a result.

If you can offer to help in any way, please contact the ABD by telephone on 07000 781544, or by E-mail to 100740.2032@compuserve.com or by post to The ABD, PO Box 19608, London, SE19 2ZW

The Last Laugh

It's not cricket

Your cricketing correspondent, Tony Bright-Paul, reports on a public meeting.

The eagerly awaited match between the Bureaucrats and the Councillor's XI for the Westheath Calming Trophy took place on the evening of Tuesday 2nd. The Councillors fielded a full team of eleven, plus nine reserves, making twenty in all. The Bureaucrats won the toss (they always do) and elected to bat. Their Captain, Chris Shaw, opened for the Bureaucrats, with just three of his team padded up (including Legal Eagle), and rather cunningly they brought along their own scorer.

The Umpire, Miss Olivier opened the proceedings by not reading the minutes, but by signing them. Then play commenced. There was a full house in the stands. All 10 of the Politically Active Ginger Group were there, rooting for the Bureaucrats, and against that there was a sprinkling of supporters for the Silent Majority, who were hoping the Councillor's team would get their act together.

The first Councillor batted a superb innings which included a century and a half. The Councillor's team were then bowled out for 100. The Bureaucrats then batted and scored 100 without loss.

The match came to an abrupt end as one of the Councillors declared, with the Councillors not having even batted. The result was Bureaucrats 100 without loss; Councillors nothing, for nought declared. Everyone quickly voted for some numbered unintelligible motions. By 8pm it was drinks.

The next net practice for the Bureaucrats will be at Blunden Hall on October 3rd. They will then put on an exhibition of spin bowling, so that hapless residents of the Westheath Road will be given a choice of chicanes or build-outs, or bumps or cushions. Like skilful salesmen they will perform the assumed close, a choice of equally unspeakable alternatives. Why should they care? They are the Bureaucrats, the Professionals. They don't have to get elected like the Councillors. And when they come to play against the Councillors again, they expect to dismiss them with contemptuous ease.

There is only one hope for the Councillor's team. Firstly they need to elect a Captain. Secondly they need four or five strike bowlers who are really familiar with the pitch, and who have not forgotten their obligations to the Silent Majority of 10,000 to 10. Thirdly they need some coaching and some net practice, without which the Bureaucrats will run rings around them again and again.

Chris duly smote to the boundary. One of the newer Councillors bowled some effective googlies. He actually admitted to driving a car himself, and to disliking humps, cushions and bumps. Chris quietly padded these away. The balls were good but lacked penetration. Then Councillor Marsh had one of the best overs of the lot, bowling a consistent line and length. Why not speed cameras? Because, Chris explained, you can't ask the police to uphold the law, they're just not interested! LBW cried the supporters of the Silent Majority, silently. Chris Marsh was clearly out (of order). The councillors did not appeal. Unfortunately Councillor Marsh's last ball (so that's a non-starter then) was duly hoisted for six.

Finally Councillor Mrs Devereux came on bowling fast underarm along the ground. She wanted action, any action, as long as it was swift action. This was meat and drink to the Bureaucrats, who put Legal Eagle in to bat this last over. He just blocked the ball for four..... weeks.

The match came to an abrupt end as one of the Councillors declared, with the Councillors not having even batted. The result was Bureaucrats 100 without loss; Councillors nothing, for nought declared. Everyone quickly voted for some numbered unintelligible motions. By 8pm it was drinks.

The next net practice for the Bureaucrats will be at Blunden Hall on October 3rd. They will then put on an exhibition of spin bowling, so that hapless residents of the Westheath Road will be given a choice of chicanes or build-outs, or bumps or cushions. Like skilful salesmen they will perform the assumed close, a choice of equally unspeakable alternatives. Why should they care? They are the Bureaucrats, the Professionals. They don't have to get elected like the Councillors. And when they come to play against the Councillors again, they expect to dismiss them with contemptuous ease.

There is only one hope for the Councillor's team. Firstly they need to elect a Captain. Secondly they need four or five strike bowlers who are really familiar with the pitch, and who have not forgotten their obligations to the Silent Majority of 10,000 to 10. Thirdly they need some coaching and some net practice, without which the Bureaucrats will run rings around them again and again.

help slow down the speed of rotation. The only exemptions to this proposal will be buses and bicycles.

2. When a cat is dropped, it always lands on its feet, and when toast is dropped, it always lands buttered side down. It is therefore proposed to strap giant slabs of hot buttered toast to the back of a hundred tethered cats; the two opposing forces will cause the cats to hover, spinning inches above the ground. Using such a giant buttered toast/cat array, a high-speed monorail could easily link London with Manchester, thus solving the problem of congestion on the M6.

We all need car parks

Seen on the A38 near the planned Birmingham Northern Relief Road are two home-made signs. The first, painted on an old door, reads 'BNRR Protest Camp'. Hung below it is a sign that says 'Car Park'.

From JP's think tank



Speed Limits - how they are set and your Right to Object

A 12-page document with all you need to know to oppose the setting of unnecessarily low limits by local authorities.

The document explains the procedures for objecting to speed limits, and provides a checklist to help you prepare details from relevant Dept documents - The simple letter of objection.

This action pack has been prepared by Malcolm Heyrick, ABD member for the wideport had blame to receive a copy and a large, stamped (26p) self-addressed envelope to The Editor, PO Box 3151, Colchester, CO6 3JH. No more members should also send a contribution of at least 25 (one quip, payable to Pro-Motor Ltd)

1. The earth may spin faster on its axis due to deforestation. As the arms of a rotating body spin increases when the arms are brought in close to the body, the cutting of all trees may cause our planet to spin dangerously fast. Add to this the friction effect of all the billions of tyres on cars being driven from east to west adding to the speed of rotation and we can prove that, once again, the nasty motor

PRIVATE MEDICINE

One of our members is Group Secretary of a Private Patients Group.

The group enjoys a 25% discount from the normal rates.

Should any of our members be interested in joining, please contact:

Brian Sealy-Clarke
19 Elmstone Gardens
Cliftonville, Margate
CT9 3HA

Tel 01843 295608

for further information.