

COMMUNITY SPEEDWATCH, RENFREWSHIRE

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SUMMARY

This paper describes a Community Speedwatch Initiative being taken forward by Renfrewshire Council in partnership with Strathclyde Police. The initiative involves community volunteers operating a portable road side speed activated display where speeding is a problem. Road signage identifies what is happening at the site and drivers see their speed indicated on the display. Registration numbers are taken and the Police have the option of writing to drivers who speed explaining that residents are concerned at speeding in this area and seeking compliance with the speed limit. The process is non-confrontational but engages the community in taking direct action.

Road Safety Overview

Like most Councils, Renfrewshire has been very successful in achieving the national targets for accident reduction. Even performance within the category "slight casualties" has been strong, indicating an overall reduction in crashes throughout Renfrewshire. The Council is predominantly urban with respect to the majority of the population and road accidents occur roughly in the ratio 4:1 urban to rural.

Detailed investigation of accident patterns identifies urban distributor roads to represent the highest risk. Typically where urban traffic flows are high and there are many conflicting vehicle and pedestrian movements, the accident rate rises. In terms of our crash reduction strategy therefore, urban distributor roads receive priority.

Throughout Renfrewshire every community has raised speeding traffic as a concern. Most residential areas seek traffic calming and survey information identifies fear of traffic as a primary concern which impacts on the quality of life in most communities. Of significance however is the fact that communities generally perceive the highest risk from speeding traffic within residential housing areas. Survey information indicates that residents are more concerned at what happens directly outside their door than on the urban distributor roads where accident rates are significantly higher.

Since 2002, the Council has carried out speed measurements at all of the 19 long term traffic monitoring sites used to measure traffic growth. A significant number of these sites lie within 30mph speed limits and by comparing the off-peak vehicle speeds at the exact same point year on year, a reasonable assessment can be made of changes in typical average speeds on Renfrewshire's urban roads. We choose off-peak periods to compare average speeds to ensure that peak hour congestion does not influence the figures. Typically, the average speed on a 30mph road will be of the order of 35mph. The range of speeds will typically go

from the high 20's to the mid 40's. There are however some instances of traffic travelling much faster, typically into the 50's and 60's.

We were keen to measure the impact of both the Scottish road safety campaign and our own community education programmes on average driver speeds. This nature of data can only become meaningful after a number of years when trend lines become statistically valid. To date however, there is no indication that average speeds are dropping. Indeed in some locations it appears that average urban speeds on 30mph roads are actually increasing.

We carry out detailed evaluation of our accident statistics annually and have identified that accident causes associated with the desire to speed such as driving too close, driving into the car in front, overtaking etc. are a factor of approximately 40% of accidents. Whilst our road safety strategy tackles a range of issues, we see reducing average urban speeds as a primary objective.

There are a number of engineering measures which can be deployed to reduce vehicle speeds including traffic islands, speed cushions, variable message signs etc. The costs associated with such measures are high however and the Council is only able to tackle a fraction of the locations where action is desirable through road risk analysis or demand from communities. Significantly, in recent years views on the use of speed cushions have become mixed. Typically, we find communities become polarised for and against speed cushions and we are now reluctant to use these except over limited lengths of road and in special circumstances.

Against this background, the Council was keen to offer a positive alternative to communities who are concerned over speeding and provide the opportunity for them to become directly engaged. We investigated trials of similar speed watch initiatives in other parts of the country which involved local community groups undertaking speed monitoring in the local areas. Typically the schemes involve local volunteers being trained in the use of a speed gun. The volunteers, with the aid of road traffic signs and Council support, measured vehicle speeds at a known speeding location and noted the numbers of vehicles who exceed the speed limit. Thereafter the Police were in a position to issue warning letters having traced vehicle owners. No penalty is issued in this process and the exercise can rightly be called education rather than enforcement.

A problem with these schemes is the potential confrontation associated with locals pointing a speed gun at a driver. Without the backing of uniformed Police, this action could be perceived as provocative and therefore generate a negative reaction from the motorist or even worse, road side confrontation.

In Renfrewshire we explored other options of delivering this kind of initiative. We determined that the best way forward was to use a portable speed activated display instead of a speed gun. The display indicates to drivers, in large letters, their speed. Road signage on approach to the Community Speedwatch initiative identifies the purpose of the exercise. From the motorists perspective therefore it is clear what the people at the side of the road are doing and the display indicates the degree to which they are exceeding the speed limit. It is therefore very much a

passive operation and not confrontational. If a driver significantly exceeds the speed limit, a registration number can be taken and the Police can trace the driver and issue a letter. Working in partnership with the Police we seek to ensure that the letter is sympathetic and simply seeks modification of behaviour to reflect a community's concerns. We perceive it to be counter productive to issue warnings threatening future enforcement action.

This report recognises that on most urban roads on most days it is the same people who travel at roughly the same time. So erratic community involvement which applies gentle pressure to modify behaviour we believe to show more potential than conventional sporadic Police enforcement. Significantly, we find that the typical speeder is not the stereotypical boy racer but simply an average driver. The positive aspect of this is that average people generally respond positively to community pressure to behave reasonably.

Setting up Community Speedwatch

One of the great values of Community Speedwatch is that there is no necessity to have historical accident problems or even identified road risk for this project to be supported. It is sufficient simply that a local community perceives speeding as a concern and recognises that by tackling this they can improve the quality of life. Given an active community council or residents association, who are prepared to volunteer the Council can engage with these groups and provide a framework for taking the initiative forward.

The first issues to be tackled include provision of road signage and equipment combined with basic training. It is clearly important that volunteer groups understand how to deploy road traffic signs, combined with the speed activated equipment at a location agreed with the Roads Authority and the Police. The Police offer the volunteers guidance on safe practices as well as confrontation avoidance. Appendix 1 and 2 detail information given to groups and the record sheets used. To date, the Council has arranged insurance via Zurich Community Insurance to cover personal liability. This works out at around £350 per equipment set.

Local volunteers are encouraged to target specific sites for periods of roughly an hour on different days and at different times of the day. Local newsletters through the community can raise the profile of the exercise as can coverage in local newspapers.

The pilot exercise in Renfrewshire has focussed on Glasgow Road in the Ralston area. It is very significant that when the Community Speedwatch is in action, there is an immediate marked speed reduction with speeds reducing to below 30mph to around 27mph as drivers are embarrassed by a sign displaying their speed.

A reduction in speed is also noticeable in the opposite direction, due to roadside presence, high visibility clothing and drivers recognising the Community Speedwatch volunteers. This in turn will lead to educating drivers to recognise when they are driving in excess of the speed limit.

The Glasgow Road site is an urban dual carriageway with average vehicle speeds in the mid 30's which is typical across the Council area but has a significant proportion of vehicles doing very much higher speeds. Local residents are concerned to cross this road and indeed the accident rate is higher than would be considered normal.

Elements of Glasgow Road have sufficient accidents to justify deployment of the mobile speed camera enforcement team.

Prior to commencing the pilot, extensive speed measurement was carried out on Glasgow Road and at other locations within Ralston where we intended piloting this scheme. Evaluation will take place for the next 24 months to determine the effect of the scheme.

Unlike previous speed gun schemes this exercise has attracted a reasonable degree of positive newspaper coverage. Consequently there has been very strong demand from communities throughout Renfrewshire to engage. Our intention therefore is to purchase around 6-12 sets of equipment which can be loaned to communities.

Resources

We estimate that the Council input to a Community Speedwatch initiative is approximately £1400 with respect to the provision of signs and speed activated displays. Staff time may be around 8 hours per initiative when meetings and training is considered. Thereafter the exercise operates at no cost to the Council and is undertaken entirely by volunteers. Early indications are therefore that this approach is likely to be highly cost effective in comparison with the alternatives available to the Council to tackle speeding problems.

A significant value of this approach is that the whole debate on speeding within communities is elevated within community councils and residents associations. Rather than being negative and being critical of a Council unable to deliver engineering solutions, the debate becomes positive and targeted towards self help. This exercise also helps to persuade communities that it is most of us who speed and need to modify our behaviour and not the preconceived concept of "boy racers" or "people who do not live here".

Moving Forward

This initiative is one of a basket of measures being taken forward in Renfrewshire which try to influence driver behaviour. We have recognised the need to reinforce the Scottish road safety campaign message at a local level in an attempt to reduce average speeds on our urban roads. We have the benefit as a Council of direct access to the entire population through the Council's wide range of services. Through utilising this network and reinforcing driver education with initiatives like Community Speedwatch, we hope to achieve far more ambitious targets for casualty reduction and significantly improve the quality of life within our communities.

Appendix 1

RENFREWSHIRE COMMUNITY SPEEDWATCH

Community Speedwatch is a Partnership involving Renfrewshire Council, Strathclyde Police and volunteers from local community groups, who are concerned about inappropriate vehicle speeds where they stay.

Participants are of driving age (17 and over) and are trained how to collate information on vehicle speeds in their streets. The information is passed to the Police and the Council for their attention so they can take appropriate action.

A radar equipped instant messaging sign is set up at the side of the road which displays the speed, in large numbers, to passing vehicles. Registration numbers are logged against those vehicles driving in excess of the speed limit. Time, date and weather conditions are also recorded.

Drivers are aware from the display that they have exceeded the speed limit. The police have the option of sending a letter of warning to the vehicle owner.

Any community group who wishes to be involved in the initiative will have to meet certain requirements:

- There should be a minimum of 6 volunteers in a local area group including a Co-ordinator and Deputy and 2 on the roadside at any one time.
- All volunteers must be of driving age (at least 17 years old) and must “check-in/ phone their local Police office before going out to monitor speeds. (Community Policing Sergeant 0141 532 6012/ 6023)
- Speed monitoring sites should be pre-agreed with the Police and the council, must have a 30 mph or less, speed limit and must not be on a trunk road.
- Advanced warning signage must be set up 45m before the Radar Sign. The council will loan out the Radar Sign and the Warning Sign.
- High visibility jackets, mobile telephone and public liability insurance must be obtained and used by the group (initially the Council has agreed to provide these in the first year)

Anyone who would like further information about the Community Speedwatch initiative should contact:-

Inspector M. Oates of Strathclyde Police 0141 532 6023

The Head of Roads, Renfrewshire Council, Cotton Street, Paisley

www.renfrewshire.gov.uk

