

The Future of Road Safety Camera Partnerships A Policing Perspective

What is the purpose of this document?

The purpose of this briefing is to add a police service perspective to the current debate about the future sustainability of road safety camera enforcement following the recent announcement by the Department for Transport of substantial cuts in the road safety support grant.

The views expressed in the briefing document are the professional views of the lead for the Association of Chief Police Officers on Roads Policing, Chief Constable Mick Giannasi. However, they have been formulated in consultation with chief officer colleagues and range of professionals in the road safety field.

What are the key messages contained in the document?

The key messages which are contained in this briefing are as follows:-

- road safety partnerships have achieved significant reductions in road casualties in recent years;
- speed enforcement cameras have been a cornerstone of the success which has been achieved;
- there is clear evidence to show that cameras work and are widely accepted by the public;
- as a result of cuts in grant funding, the future sustainability of the system is now at risk;
- a reduction in camera enforcement activity, without alternative, will lead to increased casualties;
- decisive action is required to prevent the demise of the system whilst options are considered;
- the Government has stated that responsibility for decision making rests with local authorities;
- balanced decision making is needed to sustain the benefits of the system;
- Government intervention is needed to provide clarity and to avoid pre-emptive action.

What is the context to the briefing?

In recent weeks, there has been a great deal of unhelpful and inaccurate speculation in the media suggesting that the Government is about to 'axe' thousands of speed cameras.

The speculation grew significantly following a decision by Oxfordshire County Council to reduce the funding provided to the safety camera partnership by 70%. This decision has, in turn, forced the partnership to announce that camera operations will cease in the near future. In the last few days, the Wiltshire road safety camera partnership has also announced that it is ceasing operations due to cuts in its funding.

A number of other partnerships are reporting concerns that they may have to curtail operations following similar but less significant cuts in the budgets allocated by their own local authorities.

Most partnerships are operating under significant financial pressures and although they are not facing immediate closure, many will have to reduce the current level of enforcement activity to a significant extent. The most significant threat is to the sustainability of the 'back office' which administers the fixed penalty and driver education system.

Inaccurate and sensationalist media reporting has not helped the situation and it is important that some balance is introduced to the debate and that decisive action is taken to stabilise the situation.

So what are the facts about safety camera enforcement?

It is important that we focus on the facts rather than the distorted truth which some elements of the media would like the public to believe. Some of the myths which have been repeatedly employed over many years to support sensationalist headlines need to be challenged. The most commonly used are as follows:-

- **Speed Cameras Do Not Work** – Not true. Properly used and appropriately sited, safety cameras do save lives. A series of independent evaluations has shown that where cameras have been installed at high risk sites, average speeds reduce and the number of people killed and seriously injured falls. Last year saw the lowest levels of casualties on our roads in modern history and the evidence that camera enforcement has been a major contributory factor is difficult to dispute. The basis of the assertion that cameras work is summarised at Appendix 1.
- **There is no Public Support for Speed Enforcement Cameras** – Not true. Most people support the use of enforcement cameras. In a recent poll of fifteen thousand motorists carried out by AA as part of its Populus survey, seven out of ten motorists agreed that camera enforcement is a necessary part of our approach to casualty reduction. These results are replicated to a significant extent in local surveys. Speed enforcement is one of the things which local people most often raise when asked what their priorities are in terms of community safety. It is not, as the media suggest, something that sensible, properly informed people will be glad to see the back of.
- **Cameras Are a Means of Revenue Raising.** Not true. All the money raised from fines goes back to the Treasury and funding is allocated to individual partnerships based on a grant, irrespective of the number of fixed penalty tickets issued. Increasingly, partnerships are moving towards the use of average speed cameras and driver education as an alternative to prosecution because the objective is to reduce speed and save lives not to catch people offending.

What are the potential consequences of inaccurate media reporting?

Inaccurate media speculation could put lives at risk. There is a body of evidence, drawn from a series of independent evaluations, to show that safety cameras have played a significant part in reducing road casualties over the past decade. That is in part, because they provide sanctions for those who choose to put the lives of others at risk by driving at inappropriate speeds, and in part, because they act as a deterrent for others who might otherwise choose to do so.

It is important to remember that the cameras are only put there in the first place because there is a high risk of a collision occurring at the locations where they are sited. It is also important to remember that marginal increases in speed can be the difference between life and death.

If those who are currently deterred by the prospect of enforcement get a sense that the personal consequences are reduced, then speeds will inevitably increase and the risk of more people being killed and injured on our roads will increase accordingly. As an experiment, one local authority recently put a bag over one of its cameras for four weeks to see what happened and the number of vehicles being driven at unsafe speeds increased by a third overnight.

It is also important to remember that the effect of speed enforcement is not limited to those sites where cameras are used or installed. The deterrent effect is much broader and the visible nature of the enforcement system encourages people to reduce their speeds more generally.

It would be nice to think that if we stopped using cameras, after ten years of living with them, people would now behave more responsibly. However, that appears not to be the case. In Oxfordshire, where camera enforcement has ceased due to funding cuts, two cameras were left recording speeds and showed an increase in offending at one site of 88% and at another of 18%.

So what *are* the facts about the current situation?

Although there **are** concerns about the longer term future of road safety camera partnerships as a result of recent Government announcements, the threat is neither as widespread nor as imminent as implied by the media.

The claim that the Government is forcing local authorities to withdraw from safety camera operations is a gross exaggeration of the situation.

Although the Government is responsible for road safety strategy, it has made it clear that it does not wish to be involved in decisions about how road safety is delivered at the local level. Those decisions rest with local authorities working in partnership with other agencies like the police and the health service. As such, although the availability of Government funding is clearly an issue for road safety partnerships, the decision whether or not to utilise camera enforcement as part of the approach to maintaining safe roads is a local one and one in which, by choice, the Government does not intervene.

The second point to make is that the Government has not made any announcements about discontinuing or for that matter reducing the level of speed camera enforcement. What the Road Safety Minister has announced is that the Government will not fund any more **new fixed site** cameras. He has said nothing about existing sites and as far as we are aware, has made no comment at all about other forms of enforcement technology, like mobile cameras.

In a recent letter, addressed to the ACPO lead, he confirmed that in his view, there was 'an important role for safety camera enforcement' in the future. In a recent meeting, he expressed support for proposals to extend the use of driver education and average speed cameras, both of which are producing excellent outcomes in terms of reducing offending behaviour.

Why is there a problem?

At the same time as making announcements about its views on fixed site cameras, the Government also announced a 27% (£39m) reduction in the road safety support grant which is the funding provided to local authorities for road safety purposes.

It is the combination of those two announcements, compounded, by irresponsible media reporting, pre-emptive action by some local authorities and a subsequent lack of Government intervention which has created the risk to the continued viability of the camera enforcement programme.

Although the scale of the funding reduction is challenging, the real problem for local authorities and police forces is not the scale of the cuts. We all appreciate that the current economic situation requires public services to reduce spending and we would not expect safety camera enforcement to be any different. It is the way in which the cuts have been imposed, in year, which has created real problems within the system.

Just under half of the funding cut relates to capital spend and the other half relates to revenue. The capital element is the whole of the capital spend for 2010/11 which effectively means that all investment in equipment, whether that was intended to replace ageing equipment or to provide new equipment like average speed cameras, has been withdrawn.

In addition, the way in which the revenue element has been cut, effectively means that unless local authorities find money from elsewhere in their budgets, there will be no money to pay administrative staff in the fourth quarter of this financial year. That means that some partnerships are having to consider making staff redundant or redeploy them now, given that there is a six month lead time in making such adjustments.

In fairness to the Government, it has not directed that the reductions in funding should be passed on directly to road safety camera partnerships and has allowed local authorities to decide how they wish to manage the cuts in light of their continuing responsibility for casualty reduction. However, in practice, many will be faced with little alternative, given that funding is being cut in other policy areas.

What is disappointing is that some local authorities have seen this as an opportunity to take even larger amounts of funding from partnerships, presumably to offset spending cuts in other areas. In some cases, decisions appear to be politically based rather than based on a reasoned analysis of the risks. As a consequence, a small number of partnerships have been indicated their intentions to cease operations. That is a high risk strategy and unless those areas have an alternative approach in place to reduce speed on their roads, it is almost inevitable that casualties will increase in the longer term.

There are alternatives to fixed site cameras and there are alternatives to enforcement. Indeed the national roads safety strategy is based on a holistic approach known as the 'three 'E's' - education, engineering and enforcement. However, all of those options rely, to a greater or lesser extent on the continued existence of road safety camera partnerships and the administrative 'back office' systems which underpin them.

The economic argument for reducing spending on camera enforcement simply does not stack up. To a great extent, albeit now done indirectly, camera enforcement is paid for by those people who put other people's lives at risk by breaking the law. If enforcement levels are reduced, then the funding returned to the Treasury also reduces.

In addition, as well as the cost in human terms, there is a huge financial cost associated with death and injury on the roads. It is estimated by the Department for Transport that each fatality costs society in the region of £1.9m and each serious injury £0.188m. It would not take a significant increase in fatalities or serious injuries to quickly erode the £39m or so which has been cut from this year's budgets.

Does that mean that people can now break the speed limit with impunity?

Although cameras operations have ceased in a handful of areas and have been curtailed in a number of others, police forces have indicated that where possible, they will continue to enforce speed limits at high risk sites in other ways.

The police service takes its duty to protect the public seriously and no where is that more important than on the roads. Fixed site cameras are only one means of enforcing speed limits and forces can continue to operate using hand held devices and mobile cameras. As such, those who continue to drive at inappropriate speeds, still risk being caught.

However, this will undoubtedly place additional pressure on resources which are already over stretched and result in a diversion from some other area of policing. The reality though is that enforcement cameras work because they are highly visible and have a blanket deterrent effect which patrolling officers cannot hope to re-create.

How has the Government responded?

We are disappointed that despite being made aware of the significant risk to the future sustainability of the national safety camera system, the Government has not intervened more incisively to mitigate the risk. The Minister has written to local authorities, but not, in our view, with sufficient clarity or authority which would encourage them to take action to prevent the gradual demise of the system or preserve the huge investment which has been made in it over the past decade.

If it has been accurately reported, the comment, ascribed to Ministers, that their actions signals the end of 'the war on the motorist' is particularly disappointing and frankly, most unhelpful. The thousands of police officers, road safety officers and other professionals who have worked tirelessly over the past decade to effectively halve the numbers of people killed on our roads will be equally disappointed.

There is no 'war' on the motorist. What there is, is a concerted campaign, based on a variety of tactics, one of which is camera enforcement, to prevent irresponsible people from causing death and injury on the roads. If that could be described as a war then so be it ... but it is undoubtedly a just one.

In our view, there is currently a policy vacuum which is creating adverse consequences. Locally, decisions are being made based on harsh financial reality, coupled with perceptions of what the Government's longer term intentions might be. Potentially damaging responses by some local authorities are not being challenged as a matter of principle.

We have written to the Minister expressing those concerns and are in regular discussions with officials at the Department of Transport. However, we remain concerned that unless something decisive is done in the near future, the system will continue to be wound down to the extent that it becomes ineffective.

ACPO has done what it can to 'steady the ship' but that will not be enough. If the Government is committed to speed enforcement as part of its ongoing road safety strategy, it needs to say so now and it needs to make it clear what the future looks like.

As things stand, by pre-emption rather than design, there appears to be the potential for a significant short term reduction in the existing camera enforcement capability. It would be a retrograde step if this was allowed to happen indiscriminately, because the position might not be easily recovered. In seeking to move forward, we must ensure that at a local level, for want of a better phrase, the 'baby is not being thrown out with the bathwater'.

What should be the future for speed camera enforcement?

ACPO is convinced that the use of speed enforcement technology has been a cornerstone of the success which has been achieved in casualty reduction terms over the past ten years. We believe that it should be sustained and developed. However, we do realise that in the current environment, it also needs to be done at a reduced cost.

However, we have received loud and clear the message that the Government is unwilling to invest further in creating new fixed camera sites.

Other than making a plea to allow the upgrading of those in high risk locations which are in need of upgrade due to ageing technology, we would not be seek to persuade the Government otherwise.

We also understand that the Government wants local authorities to reduce their reliance on fixed site cameras and look for alternative ways of delivering roads safety in a more open relationship with local people. Again, we would not seek to argue against that. We are particularly supportive of the extension of the use of average speed cameras, which are achieving greater levels of compliance and are seen as being 'fair' by the motoring public.

There is also strong evidence to suggest that our driver education programmes, such as Speed Awareness and RIDE, administered through the National Driver Offender Retraining Scheme (NDORS), are an effective way of influencing driver behaviour. Evaluation shows that these schemes have a greater impact in terms of reducing recidivism than prosecution and are strongly supported by the public and by professionals involved in the field.

We also acknowledge that there may be different ways to deliver road safety in the future and we are not in any way arguing that for the status quo. However, whatever tactical options are utilised to tackle the inappropriate use of speed, they all rely on an effective and efficient 'back office' function to administer the process.

Why does the 'back office' need to be sustained?

If there is no back office, or the capacity of the back office is reduced to a level which is inefficient, then there will be consequences, not only for the use of fixed site cameras, but also for the programmes which rely on it for their administration. In particular, this will threaten the viability of programmes like NDORS and developments like average speed cameras which provide the most promising opportunities going forward. An effective back office function is also a pre-requisite to the effectiveness of the managed motorway network, an area of policy which the Government is committed to developing.

The ultimate consequence of the demise of the safety camera programme and the other programmes that rely on it for administrative support, would almost inevitably be a reversal of the downward trend in casualty figures. Inappropriate use of speed is already a factor in almost a fifth of fatal and serious road accidents and if camera enforcement is not sustained in some form, average speeds at high risk sites will almost inevitably rise.

It would be unrealistic in the current environment to expect substantial reductions in camera enforcement to be supplemented to any significant degree by on road intervention by the police. The resources which were available for speed enforcement before cameras were introduced have largely been re-deployed into other areas of roads policing and in particular into tackling criminals and dangerous offenders using the roads.

What needs to be done?

ACPO is clear that the Government wants a different emphasis on road safety camera enforcement, moving away from fixed site cameras in favour of new and emerging approaches. We understand that in the current environment, operating costs will have to be reduced substantially. We have offered to work with Government to find a more cost effective way of sustaining the camera safety infrastructure in line with its future ambitions.

We also understand that as a matter of principle, the Government is committed to reducing administrative bureaucracy whilst driving decision making and accountability down to the local level.

We also appreciate that there is a desire in philosophical terms to engage local people much more closely in deciding how their roads should be made safer and providing more information to enable them to contribute. We have offered to work with Government to bring that about.

The DfT is currently developing the terms of reference for a multi-agency 'task and finish' group which will be drawn together from a broad range of stakeholders to formulate options. However, in the meantime:-

- swift action needs to be taken by the DfT to understand and respond to what is happening at the local level in order to avoid the demise of the existing arrangements to the point where the situation cannot easily be recovered;
- it would be helpful if Ministers were to provide the clarity which is need to enable local authorities to make sensible balanced decisions about the longer term future of their camera safety partnerships;
- it is vital that local authorities give careful consideration to the consequences of any action which threatens the longer term sustainability of the safety camera enforcement system;
- if it is necessary to curtail camera enforcement operations we would urge careful consideration of the consequences and an alternative strategy to keep our roads safe.

Where can further information be obtained?

If you would like to discuss the issues raised in this briefing or require any further information, please contact the Staff Officer to the ACPO Roads Policing portfolio, Inspector Paul TAYLOR at the following email address: paul.taylor@southyorks.pnn.police.uk For media enquiries please contact swilliams@acpo.pnn.police.uk

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Research into the Effectiveness of Road Safety Cameras

The most definitive research into the effectiveness of cameras was produced by the Department for Transport in 2005. The report can be downloaded from <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/roadsafety/speedmanagement/nscp/nscp/thenationalsafetycameraprogr4597>

The research assessed the impact of cameras in twenty four police force areas over a period of three years and built upon earlier research in thirty eight areas over the four year period from April 2000 to March 2004. Only areas operating within the programme for at least a year were included in the analysis.

Since then a number of locally commissioned longer term surveys have been published, most notably in Thames Valley Cleveland and Humberside, all producing similar results to the national survey. Those are available from the local partnership websites.

The high level findings from the 2005 national survey were as follows:-

- **Vehicle speeds were down** - Surveys showed that vehicle speeds at speed camera sites had dropped by around 6% following the introduction of cameras. At new sites, there was a 31% reduction in vehicles breaking the speed limit. At fixed sites, there was a 70% reduction and at mobile sites there was an 18% reduction. Overall, the proportion of vehicles speeding excessively (i.e. 15mph more than the speed limit) fell by 91% at fixed camera sites, and 36% at mobile camera sites.
- **Both casualties and deaths were down** - After allowing for the general long-term trends there was an additional 22% reduction in collisions involving personal injury at sites after cameras were introduced. Overall, 42% fewer people were killed or seriously injured. At camera sites, there was also a reduction of over 100 fatalities per annum (32% fewer). There were 1,745 fewer people killed or seriously injured and 4,230 fewer personal injury collisions per annum in 2004. There was an association between reductions in speed and reductions in collisions involving personal injury.
- **There were significant cost benefits** - There was a positive cost-benefit of around 2.7 to 1. In 2004, the benefits to society from the avoided injuries were in excess of £258million compared to enforcement costs of around £96million.
- **There was public support for the use of safety cameras for targeted enforcement** – This was evidenced by public attitude surveys, both locally and at a national level. These generally showed that between 60 and 70% of the public accept the benefits of speed cameras.

Overall, the report concludes that **safety cameras have reduced collisions, casualties and deaths.**