

The Fenland Road Safety Campaign *(Charlotte's Way)*

Aims and Objectives



Chappell

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Introduction

The Past

As far back as anyone here can remember there have been periodic expressions of distress, anger and concern by Fenland people, following each latest death or cluster of deaths, or lucky escape, from vehicle immersions in the deep waterways adjacent to a number of Fenland roads, where little or no protection from the risk of vehicles leaving the road and entering the water has existed.

Over the years Fenland people have become accustomed to County Council officers responding to these feelings and concerns with various unconvincing justifications for not investing more in improving safety infrastructure on these Fenland roads.

For many local people this has generated a chronic sense of mistrust, frustration and despondency about the prospect of things ever changing for the better here.

The result has been a terrible waste of opportunity, for constructive engagement between the local community and those responsible for improving safety on Fenland roads, and for saving lives.

New Beginnings

The distribution of the Fenland Road Safety Campaign document "Fenland Roads, a Local Tragedy, a National Disgrace", (available on request, see contact details on Page 10), accompanied by extracts from relevant international reports on improving road safety, by the 'World Health Organisation', and the 'Commission for Global Road Safety', to key individuals in Cambridgeshire County Council, and leading Campaign supporters, including Malcolm Moss MP, and John Elworthy, Editor of the Cambs Times, has been responded to with some evidence of a renewed willingness on the part of Cambs County Council to engage in constructive communication about Fenland's road safety issues.

Key representatives from the Council have proposed a Fenland road safety focused working partnership with the Cambs Times which, it is hoped, could also involve other interested local parties. Inclusion of input from the Fenland Road Safety Campaign in this process would be a

clear indication that Cambs County Council may now be serious about engaging meaningfully with the local community's concerns, and ready at last to invest more in resolving the exceptional dangers faced on Fenland's waterway-adjacent and other rural roads.

There is much to do but the need for progress is very clear and there are real opportunities for making headway with the challenges faced.

A Wider View

The reason for the establishment of the Fenland Road Safety Campaign at the end of February 2008 was the then latest tragic death suffered as a result of the lack of protective safety barriers on one of the main waterway-adjacent Fenland roads.

Resolution of this issue remains, and will always be the prime objective of the Campaign until sufficient progress has been achieved.

In the course of researching the broader 'Public Health' issue of conspicuous loss of life on Fenland roads, however, it has become clear that there is another area of difficulty, which also cannot be ignored.

That issue is the alarming prevalence of deaths due to road accidents of Fenland males aged 15-24, compared to their peers in the rest of Cambridgeshire, and the entire 'Eastern Region'.

Although males in this age group nationally are at higher risk of death and serious injury due to road accidents than the rest of the population, it has to be a matter of great concern that the road accident death rate for this group in Fenland was shown to be the highest by some margin in the whole Eastern region, and was twice the regional average and seven times the rate in Cambridge city, during the period surveyed (2000-2004).

The continued impact of road deaths in this group is one of the key contributors to the 'below national average' and 'lowest in the county', life expectancy for men in Fenland.

This surely cannot be allowed to continue without serious efforts being made to tackle the issues involved.

It has therefore become an additional aim of the Fenland Road Safety Campaign to pursue evaluation of the factors that may be causing or aggravating the fatality rate, and to promote the pursuit of measures that may help to improve life expectancy and driving behaviour/outcomes in this sector of the local population.

Success, again, will be dependent on collaboration with and between various agencies but, if achieved, may serve as a model for similar progress to be achieved elsewhere in the county and perhaps the country as a whole.

Figure 4: Directly age standardised rate of all cause mortality in young men aged 15-24 years by L.A. 2000-2004



(As featured in the 2006 Annual Report of the Director of Public Health for Cambridgeshire)

Aims and Objectives

1. To Secure The Installation of Protective Safety Barriers on Fenland Roads Adjacent to Deep Waterways.

- a) The cost, (estimated to be around £250k per km), of 'universal' barrier installation across the entire 74km of waterway-adjacent roads in Cambridgeshire, is understood to be a limiting factor.
- b) A schedule of highest risk/priority sites and sections should therefore be identified and agreed for an initial programme of installation in Fenland to be planned, and costed, for which funds should be allocated from Cambs County Council budgets over an agreed time frame, and or pursued vigorously by appropriate Council officers (and others) from other potential sources.
- c) Priority sites for consideration should include:
 - Sections of waterway-adjacent road where there is a significant convex (waterway inclined) bend in the road, and no safety barriers present, e.g. B1098 bend 400m SW of Honey Farm, Stonea (16ft Drain), the North Bank bend, 3km E of 'Dog in a Doublet' (River Nene), and Copalder Corner, Benwick, (Nene Old Course). Note – a 100m stretch of safety barrier was installed prior to 1989 on the most dangerous bend on the 40ft Bank, and a shorter length of barrier, installed in 1997, also gives protection at the previously lethal Stag's Holt bend on the B1101, by the 20ft Drain between Coldham and March.
 - Sections of straight road where normal traffic speed is 50mph or higher and the adjacent banking is conspicuously narrow, shallow or

precipitously sloped, e.g. the 16ft Bank between Lavender Cottage, Stonea, and the road's point of departure from the 16ft Drain, 600m NE of Poulter's Drove, and nearly all of the waterway-adjacent 40ft Bank.

- Junctions where visibility for vehicles accessing the main (waterway-adjacent) road is conspicuously poor, e.g. Upwell Road (B1094) and 16ft Bank (B1098).
 - Sites or sections where other risks or concerns are known to be present, e.g. junction of Wheatsheaf Drove and 16ft Bank, where there is risk of sudden exposure to high winds due to wooded area, and Euximoor Drove to Bedlam Bridge, used by Neale-Wade Community College 'school bus' (Both 16ft Drain). Note – 'Safer Routes to School' initiative, with Cambridgeshire target of "no more than 24 child deaths or serious injuries (per year) by the year 2010", which could be exceeded by a single accident in this location.
- d) A clear time frame should be agreed for each section of safety barrier installation, with an overall schedule for a primary phase of works established over an appropriate time period, and a progress review process agreed.
- e) Specific individuals and departments in Cambs County Council to be identified with responsibility for pursuing any additional funds required to meet costs of engineering work that are beyond the capacity of the Council.
- f) Supporters of The Fenland Road Safety Campaign to commit to assist with fundraising towards the cost of agreed safety barrier installation works.

2. To Promote Better Enforcement of Appropriate Speed Regulations on Waterway-Adjacent Roads.

- a) There is good evidence that lowering traffic speed generally reduces the likelihood of accidents leading to death or serious injury, although speed may not always be critical to the outcome where vehicles become water immersed.
- b) The well indicated 50mph speed limit, first introduced on the 40ft Bank in the 1980's, is taken as an appropriate guide by many drivers, but is ignored by a significant minority.
- High visibility enforcement is required to deter excess speed. More frequent police presence would assist in conveying the message that excess speed on the 40ft Bank is unacceptable and will be detected and dealt with.
 - Average speed cameras are due to be installed on the 40ft Bank, as agreed following the cluster of deaths that occurred there in 2005/2006.
 - The time frame for this installation needs to be clarified and adhered to as far as possible.

c) A well indicated 50mph speed limit was also introduced on the 16ft Bank in the 1980's, but was soon abandoned, apparently on the advice of Cambridgeshire Police, that they were unable to enforce it.

- This decision needs to be re-examined and consideration needs to be given to the re-introduction of a 50mph limit, as this would support the message that care is required on this road.
- Enforcement policy also needs to be re-examined, whatever the speed limit happens to be. If 50mph was unenforceable, in what way might 60mph be any more enforceable?
- Additional efforts need to be agreed and made regarding surveillance, detection and sanctions enforcement, for excess speeding or other dangerous driving behaviour on the 16ft Bank.
- A combination of high visibility and covert surveillance by local traffic police is strongly indicated.
- Both activities, if agreed, should be publicly announced and widely advertised to act as a deterrent to speeding and other dangerous driving activity on the 16ft Bank, and to emphasise the message that speeding is unacceptable and that care is required on this road.

d) Speed limit selection and enforcement are also issues significant to the safety of road use on the North Bank Road, adjacent to the River Nene.

- Consideration needs to be given to the choice of speed limit, and additional efforts that could be made to advertise and promote enforcement as detailed for the 16ft Bank.

e) Further consideration should be given regarding the potential benefits of safety camera or average speed camera installation on part or all of the 16ft Bank, and the North Bank Road.

f) The use of surveillance cameras may also be considered to identify, and communicate in an advisory or educational way with, speeding or otherwise dangerous drivers.

3. To Ensure Improved Driver Awareness of the Hazards of Waterway-Adjacent Roads.

a) Significant improvements need to be made to water hazard warning signs at the major entry points to, and along waterway-adjacent roads.

- Where 'High Visibility' fatality or serious injury rate signs are used they should give currently accurate information, which should be updateable, to avoid loss of validity and impact on driver behaviour. Note – The sign presently in place on the 40ft Bank which reads "Next 5 miles, last 5 years, 3 killed", was installed in 1996 and has long since been out of date and inaccurate.
- Triangular 'water hazard' warning signs on the 16ft Bank are inferior to those now in place on the 40ft Bank, and in critical locations such as

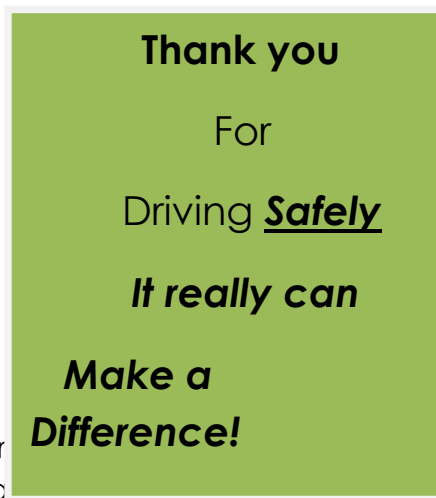
Bedlam Bridge and Boots Bridge are, respectively, completely missing or so old and worn as to be indecipherable and quite useless.

- Replacement of some or all of these signs on the 16ft Bank should therefore be effected as a matter of urgency.

b) Signs giving positive, encouraging messages may also be helpful and worth considering, e.g. near the start of a target stretch of road.



Or, near the end of a target stretch of road.



c) Posters and leaflets produced by Cambs County Council in 2006 after a cluster of vehicle immersion fatalities occurred on the 40ft Bank in 2005 and 2006.

- The featured monochrome picture of a section of the 40ft Bank with skid marks on the road with just the words "Slow down on Fenland Roads", was appropriately bleak and 'to the point', but most impressive in its larger form as seen on the back of a local bus.
- Further use of this or similar posters, showing anonymised but thought provoking accident scenes, on buses or other vehicles, or roadside billboards at strategic locations, would strongly support efforts to raise public awareness of potential dangers on waterway-adjacent Fenland roads.

- If leaflets are to be used further, the evidence from the 2006 campaign has been that targeting public service and commercial outlets as resource access points is a very unreliable way of reaching much of the local population in a meaningful, effective or lasting way.
- Consideration should be given to use of local newspapers to carry a leaflet style road safety feature on an annual basis instead of or in addition to any planned Council road safety leaflet issue.
- Informational content of leaflets or leaflet style newspaper features needs to be re-evaluated, as too much detail is likely to be unhelpful in the event of an accident.

4. To Help Reduce the 'Highest in the Region' Death Rate (due to road traffic accidents) of the Fenland 15-24 year old Male Population.

- a) The 'Annual Report of the Director of Public Health' (2006), indicated that the conspicuously high death rate in 15-24 year old males in Fenland was due to road traffic accidents.
- The 'Fenland Spearhead Action Plan' (August 2006), indicated that "the national evidence base for reducing accidents in the 15-24 age group is relatively poor. A recent review of the evidence carried out by the Eastern Region Public Health Observatory concluded that formal driver education programmes, especially in young drivers, paradoxically increase the crash rate and should not be resourced."
 - Other kinds of educational initiatives are therefore required if progress is to be made.
 - Evidence from other health risk linked behaviours such as smoking and binge-drinking suggests it may be prudent to anticipate some possible erosion of gender bias in future accident rates.
 - Educational initiatives may therefore be primarily aimed at young males but should not exclude young females, who may in any case be passengers of vehicles driven by either sex.
- b) Efforts should be made to impact directly on the behaviour of the 15-24 year old population.
- Risk factors such as driver age, number of passengers, time of journey, use of alcohol and drugs, and road conditions should be included in safety awareness raising material aimed at young drivers, and could be distributed through secondary schools, colleges and driving schools/instructors in the area.
 - Additional 'high impact' film or documentary material may be resourced showing the consequences of accidents of various cause involving young drivers, especially highlighting the impact of death and serious injury of drivers/passengers/other road users on crash survivors, relatives and friends.

- This material may be offered for general viewing to target groups in secondary schools and colleges, and learner drivers.
 - This and other material might also be offered as part of a 'corrective' educational package to young drivers found speeding or otherwise driving unsafely, either as well as standard penalties such as points on licence and fines, or as a possible alternative to points and fines, where their application might be held back on a 'suspended' basis, to additionally deter further transgression.
- C) Further efforts should be made to engage young people at an earlier, more 'receptive' age in developing appreciation of the risks they are likely to need to be aware of and manage as 'future drivers'.
- Current PSHE (Personal and Social Health Education) programs offered at primary school level cover various aspects of safety awareness including 'road safety'.
 - The 'road safety' focus, however, seems to be on children's awareness and skill needs as pedestrians, cyclists and passengers (who need to comply with seat belt regulations), whilst it appears that minimal consideration is given to the development of their engagement with ideas about future good practice as the drivers most of them one day will become.
 - Encouragement should be given to local authority and other primary education providers to identify or develop suitable additional sessional material to promote young people's investment in and 'ownership' of 'driver perspective' road safety and road hazard awareness ideas.
 - This material could be introduced at a similar time to other safety awareness material already being used (as stated) and other prevention focused initiatives such as drug and alcohol awareness work.
 - Repetition and development of associated themes would probably be more beneficial, than single episode exposure or engagement.
 - 'Future driver' perspective road safety work may therefore usefully be revisited on an annual basis, perhaps to coincide with 'National Road Safety Week', as promoted by the road safety charity, 'Brake'. Note – The theme for the National Road Safety Week, November 10-16, 2008, is "Protect the ones you love".
 - Long-term support for this work across Fenland would be required to produce the changes in behaviour and outcomes required.
 - Options for monitoring and auditing the value of the developments proposed above would need to be considered and agreed.
 - If successful or interpreted as likely to succeed, promising developments in Fenland might serve as a model for similar developments elsewhere.

- d) Additional initiatives may be desirable with reference to the dangers experienced and sometimes caused by motorcyclists.

Concluding Thoughts

'Rome was not built in a day', the saying goes, and change here in the Fens will not happen overnight, even after waiting so long for more effective action to be taken to make our waterway-adjacent roads truly safer and to reduce the dreadful toll being taken on the lives of young drivers and other road users here.

With persistence and vision, and those interested in and responsible for future developments in road safety working together towards a common aim, there is a real chance that progress can be made here, and that Fenland can become a safer, healthier, and better place to live, work, and travel in.

Surely, that's a future worth aspiring to, working for and investing in?



Graham Chappell

for

The Fenland Road Safety Campaign

(Charlotte's Way)

September 2008

'Feedback'

If you would like to help support the Fenland Road Safety Campaign, written feedback on the content of this document and any further thoughts, advice or suggestions on the issues it covers, would be very much appreciated.

Everything from a heartfelt 'one-liner' to a detailed letter or essay will be welcomed. The inclusion of a brief reference to any relevant personal experience or past/present community role, however humble it may seem, would again be most helpful.

Contact:

Please forward whatever you feel able to write, to:

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Thankyou.

*“The ‘Aims and Objectives’ document is excellent
and provides a sound base from which
the
campaign can grow” – Malcolm Moss
MP*

Printed in March, Cambridgeshire, September 2008

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