

To: LEE HUNT <ljhunt1@virginmedia.com>

Subject: Re: 4 years' accident and casualty figures for Portsmouth's 20mph area - dreadful

**Cllr Lee Hunt, Portsmouth City Council,
bcc to all other PCC Councillors, MPs and MEPs and others.**

Dear Cllr. Hunt,

Thank you for your prompt response to my overnight email, though the timing suggests that you did not have much time to review the information and analysis I sent you before you sent it. Indeed, your dismissive response is another example of a syndrome with which I have become wearily familiar over the past twelve years - the "*My mind is made up, please do not confuse me with the facts*" approach to analysis and understanding. Or if you prefer a more academic version, "cognitive dissonance", a term coined decades ago by a psychologist to describe those unable to accept inconvenient facts.

As a former engineer and owner of an electronics manufacturing company my approach has always been the opposite - I had no alternative but to make decisions on the basis of the best information available, analysed logically and systematically, and indeed to face facts and admit I was wrong when I found that I was. I had no alternative because design errors, poor quality control, incorrect pricing or burying my head in the sand over such errors would, in a privately owned company, lead only to insolvency.

Your position is of course quite different - the relationships between policies and spending on the one hand and results on the others are rarely clear, usually takes years to become clear even if they do, and of course Councils funded by taxpayers do not go bust when they make mistakes. Also, unlike aerospace safety engineering for example, where the opinions of uninformed lay people are never taken into account, you, as a politician, think them important.

For our mutual convenience my replies to the specific points you make are interleaved in italics in yours - in addition of course to the considerable amount of detail on my web site that you are unlikely to have had time to read, as yet:

At 10:29 17/12/2012, you wrote:

Dear Idris,

...but what's your point ?

*Reply. My point is very simple indeed - as the graphs at <http://www.fightbackwithfacts.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Portsmouth-4-yrs-v-GB-S11.pdf> confirm, **serious injuries in your 20mph area have risen over the first 4 years**, in stark contrast to falling national trends on built-up (and indeed, though not shown, on all) roads. This does not of course prove beyond reasonable doubt that the adverse trend was caused by the 20mph limit and nothing else, but it is in my view a long enough sustained trend to suggest a causal link - especially as the same has happened elsewhere.*

It seems to me entirely reasonable that, having recently obtained data which your Council had decided not to report, I should advise Councillors and others of what has happened, despite your Council's misplaced claims in 2009 of "encouraging signs".

and, if it is so terrible - why are other local authorities want to introduce area-wide 20mph schemes?

Given that your Council gave presentations to other Councils on the supposed success of your scheme, there seems little doubt either that your people encouraged them to follow your lead, or that this influenced them to do so. Another factor is that the DfT, who had earlier advised PCC not to embark on its scheme because little or nothing would be achieved, were also seriously misled by your Council's claims and indeed by the weasel-worded and equally misleading Atkins reports.

Another reason is that many of those schemes went ahead before statistically significant results were available from yours, not least because your Council chose not to publish results for the 3rd and 4th years, and it was only recently that I was able to obtain those results.

Another is of course politicians' concern about public opinion, being re-elected and their constant need to be "seen to be doing something" - an element all too clear in your Council's briefing note to Councillors (but not to me) in response to my first complaint - see <http://www.fightbackwithfacts.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/PCC-Briefing-Note-inc-my-Second-Response1.pdf>

Are you seriously arguing that vehicles travelling faster are safer ?

Comment. Here we seem to be heading into territory best described as "naive and simplistic" - that higher speeds are always more dangerous. Here are a few examples of when higher speeds are safer:

a/ overtaking a 50mph car on a 60mph country road is, on average, safer at 70mph than at 60mph because the length of time spent on the wrong side of the road is shorter.

b/ try driving at 50mph on the M40 and see for yourself how dangerous that is. (I did it some years ago, in a 1938 Alvis running on 4 cylinders instead of 6, and I can assure you that I will not do it again any time soon.)

c/ Traffic engineers have known for decades that the safest speed at which to drive is at or slightly above the 85th percentile speed - that is, the speed which 85% are not exceeding. Risk rises at higher speeds but it also rises at lower speeds.

d/ slower speeds mean more time to complete any given journey, which means more time at risk on roads carrying more vehicles (i.e. greater congestion and more objects to hit).

e/ It is also well established that drivers pay less attention at low speeds and more attention at high speeds - given that some 70% of crashes are due to momentary inattention, that is surely significant.

f/ In context of your 20mph area, emphasis was placed on roads where speeds had fallen - but the trivial average reduction of 1mph shows (at least to anyone who understands arithmetic) that speeds must have risen on other roads. A naive observer might say that these more or less cancel out but it ain't necessarily so, any more than the risk to a man walking along a cliff edges is the same if he deviates a yard inland or a yard out to sea.

By that I mean (as I set out in my complaints to the Council) logic suggests that drivers who increases speed by (say) 5mph above what he previously thought safe, are likely to have a greater number of extra accidents than drivers who reduce speed by the same 5mph below what they previously thought safe. In other words, the risk/speed relationship is not symmetrical.

This non-exhaustive list is not intended to argue that any one of them is a complete explanation, rather that the explanation lies in a complex, changing mix of these various factors. The one thing we can say with absolute certainty is that slower is not always safer.

Which brings me to the other aspect - perception of improved safety. Experiments on the Continent confirm that lower speed limits that are not in reality accompanied by lower speeds can and do lead to more accidents - like it or not. This is because pedestrians, cyclists and drivers who have been lead by propaganda and visible limits to believe that speeds are lower are less careful and pay less attention than they otherwise would - then BANG.

I can also tell you that the residents I represent, here in Central Southsea, overwhelmingly want 20 mph maximum speed limits,

Comment. As above, professional safety engineers - like two of my campaigning friends - pay no attention whatever to the views of people who know little or nothing about safety, engineering or the subject in question.

So how much do your Southsea residents know about 20mph limits? Do they know that serious injuries have risen not fallen in Portsmouth? I doubt whether one in a thousand do, even of the first two years, and far fewer than that in respect of years three and four whose results your Council did not publish.

Do they realise that speeds have risen on almost as many roads as fell on others?

What do they know about this subject at all, other than that provided to them by your Council, which as we know has systematically misrepresented the results, until they decided not to publish them at all?

Do you know the American expression "Motherhood and apple pie" - the standard phrase for something that everyone will be in favour of? If course your residents are in favour of lower speeds - if they have been told that they will be safer. But would they be in favour if they were aware of the adverse trends in serious injuries?

What is your trade off, your balancing act between public approval on the one hand and more serious injuries on the other? Not being in the Popularity Stakes I could not care less what voters think of me, though I accept that you have to take a different view. But I commend to you the 1930's words of Winston Churchill, "If it comes to a choice between being popular or being right, I prefer to be right because by being right I will become popular." as indeed he did, because he was right. As indeed am I.

and want them enforced.

Comment - "Aye, there's the rub"! You must be aware that, especially in present economic circumstances there is not the slightest chance of police enforcement, as Force after Force across the country have made clear. And rightly so, given the dreadfully low levels of enforcement and detection of other offences across the criminal spectrum.

Your muddled and one-track thinking around implementation in other areas 'just because Portsmouth did it' demonstrates your astonishing lack of knowledge.

Comment. I suggest that the this reply and the massive amount of documentation on my web site refutes that charge without any further comment from me, other than pointing out that your simplistic, naive and ill-informed views serve only to confirm your own failings in that regard.

These other places will have carried out extensive surveys and consulted with residents, and only introduce schemes after much consideration. They certainly will not do so just because somewhere else has, although they clearly think it works here.

Comment. Over the past twelve years, mostly in connection with speed cameras, I have come across more utter nonsense, more ill-informed and un-informed drivel, wishful thinking and serious misrepresentation by local authority road safety officers, speed camera partnerships and indeed the DfT (see for example <http://www.fightbackwithfacts.com/how-the-figures-were-skewed/> where they fabricated results that were wrong by a factor of 50) than I came across in thirty years as an engineer and businessman, errors and discrepancies so grotesque that I would never have thought them possible had I not seen them with my own eyes. And even worse in a sense, blatant refusal to face facts and admit errors brought to their attention - see for example <http://www.fightbackwithfacts.com/humberside-safer-roads-false-claims/> And if you find that difficult to believe, try reading <http://www.fightbackwithfacts.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/F.34-Ladyman-to-Cttee.pdf> and then tell me that I am wrong.

And indeed, if as you claim of other Authorities "they clearly think it works here" that surely only helps prove my point - that unlike me (unpaid and self-financed) they have neither sought nor found the 3rd and 4th year results your own Council chose not to publish. What value should be place on the opinions of those who have not studied the results properly, if at all?

You will not budge me one bit - I have seen the mangled bodies and wrecked lives of too many young people caused by speed and their victims on the streets. I am very pleased our city has a citywide mainly 20mph scheme.

Comment. I see, naive belief trumps evidence, wishful thinking preferred to sensible analysis, popular approval by those who know little and understand less, matters more than 15 extra serious injuries compared to national trends. As I said at the beginning, another example of "My mind is made up, please do not confuse me with the facts".

Sincerely

Idris Francis

Best wishes, Cllr Lee Hunt