

OPERATION AVERT 1

Category: Creme and Disorder Reduction
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Operation Avert

A Divisional Road Policing Initiative

PC Ian Brayshaw

This POP is as a result of a number of serious and fatal road traffic Collisions that occur on a small section of `A' class road within the Fylde Borough. The road is a major arterial route for vehicle travelling to and from Blackpool, Poulton and the Fleetwood areas. The road is situated to the North of Blackpool.

1 The area. in question is mainly an agricultural one with open aspects. Fences and hedges bordering the scene are subject to vehicles crashing through them damaging farmers crops and in some cases allowing livestock to have access to the road way which in itself causes further problems that require police attendance.

When the accident statistics were examined it clearly showed that there is a problem with the bend at Larbreck along the A586, the assumption being that the stretch of road will continue to generate injuries and casualties until improvements are made via engineering.

Upon examining the scene it was found that although the roadway is subject to a 50-mph speed limit, motorists are exceeding the limit and approaching the bend too fast. Although speed enforcement was considered as a way of addressing this situation from occurring this would only have the desired effect when police presence was available.

1 The siteing of a permanent speed camera was considered and dismissed at an early stage due to the topography of the road.

1 It was considered rather than removing the cause of the problem i.e. the bend, it would be easier to make the bend more visible and to highlight the severity of the bend to motorists on the approach thus hopefully slowing them down and reducing the number of accidents. The intention was to liase with the local Highway authority and raising a time issue, encourage an early resolution to the problem.

1 The success of the project will be gauged in the long term by analysing the number of accidents over a five-year period and comparing these figures to the number of accidents that have occurred since the, changes have been made. However there have been no accidents at all in the last ten months giving an encouraging outlook for the long term picture.

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This problem was first highlighted as a result of a number of officers dealing with serious and fatal road traffic accidents that had occurred along a major A class road.

A survey was conducted involving further officers who had attended incidents on this particular stretch of road. The officers were interviewed as to the causes of their respective accidents and a pattern began to emerge.

Initially when speaking to individual officers who had had dealings with incidents along that road there appeared to be no specific problems but when information from each incident was gathered together it emerged that there was in fact a problem and this could be narrowed down to a small section of the roadway between Larbreck farm and Well Lane on the A586.

The A586 Garstang Road, Larbreck, Little Eccleston is some 1.4 kilometres from the junction with the A585.

It consists of a single carriageway, some 6.4 meters wide, and with one lane in either direction. The two halves of the road are separated by hazard warning lines painted on the road surface. The road itself is of tar and chip construction, in a good state of repair and is subject to a 50 mph speed limit.

When travelling along the A586, towards the Blackpool direction, and approaching the area identified as the accident hotspot, the road is straight after coming over a rise and passing the junction with Well Lane on the right hand side. The road then travels downhill and into a dip. After the dip the road rises slightly and goes around a left hand bend. It is at the bend that the 'hotspot' is located. 'On the approach to the bend there is a small left hand bend hazard sign on the nearside grass verge, the majority of the year this is hidden by the hedgerows.

Travelling in the opposite direction, then again the road is straight going downhill slightly to the right bend, there being a right hand bend sign to the nearside on the approach.

This particular section of carriageway is completely unlit and is bordered on both sides by agricultural fields. The road is subject to a mandatory 50mph speed limit.

In winter months the open aspects of the road makes it prone to frost and black ice this poses an obvious extra hazard for motorists.

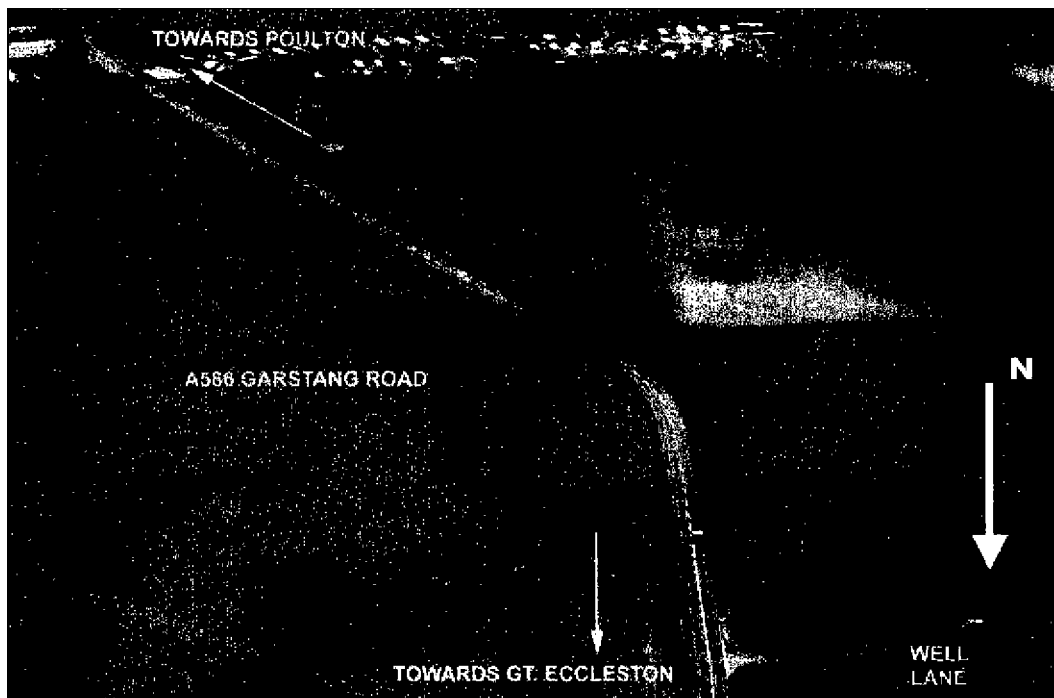
At this section, the road has a sharp bend preceded by a downward gradient. Although the camber of the road is very favourable for the approaching motorists, they appear to fail to appreciate the severity of the 'curve This is exacerbated by the fact that motorist have a

view of the road ahead beyond the bend as they travel down the hill. If the road appears clear they fail to reduce their speed, enter the bend too fast and lose control of their vehicles. Once out of control the vehicles leave the carriageway and collide with the fences and hedges that line the road, posing a risk of injury to the unfortunate motorist, which include a risk of head on collisions.

This also affects the farmers who operate the nearby fields. Damage to fencing allows farm animals to stray onto the roadway, which causes further hazards to motorists and problems for the police.

A major cause of the problem is that on the approach to the bend the road signage is of a poor quality. At certain times, of the year overgrown hedgerows can hide it. Due to cost restraints these are not regularly maintained and kept to an acceptable level.

An initial visit to the scene confirmed that there appeared to be a problem and as motorist approached the bend travelling west towards Poulton they would drift over towards the opposing traffic. Similarly traffic heading in the opposite direction, towards Great Eccleston, would tend to cut the apex of the corner encroaching onto the opposing lane. Several visits to the area were made a various time of the day and night in an attempt to obtain information to assist the investigating Officer.



When travelling at the mandatory speed limit the curvature of the bend was found not to be a specific problem and vehicles were able to negotiate the bend naturally continuing their journey unaffected.

An initial problem found was that the bend was more severe than it actually looked and that it was situated at the bottom of a dip that as motorist approached the bend they were able to see if any other vehicles were approaching or could see that the opposite carriageway was clear. Thus encouraging them not to slow down on the approaches.

The project was then trying to achieve a number of small priorities that were affected within one major one, that being the reduction of casualties caused as a result of accidents.

For this project to be successful a reduction in the number of casualties would have to be found.

When the road was assessed initially there appeared not to be a specific problem but upon closer examination of the figures available the number of accidents could be placed into a very small area of the road therefore showing a serious problem did exist.

These figures were initially obtained from the accidents clerks database and compared to those figures maintained by Lancashire County Council. Which proved to be consistent with the findings gained by myself.

Having obtained the figures,, several visits were made to the area in question and a detailed visual study was conducted of the traffic passing through this particular hazard, in particular making notes of the speed vehicles approached the bend. It was noted that a high proportion of the vehicles approached the bend at a far greater speed than the safe negotiation of the bend suggested.

This was found to be the probable major cause of the accidents occurring.

When other bends along the same stretch of road were compared it was found that signage differed considerably from the one at Larbreck, when figures were compared with these other areas there were considerable differences.

Enquiries revealed that policy is that on a stretch of road signage must be consistent along its full length and clearly this particular bend fell outside these requirements.

A site meeting was arranged with a representative from the Lancashire County Council Highways Department and the police, where it was then possible to see at first hand the situation and agreements could be reached. Ideally removal of the bend would have totally removed the problem but due the costs involved in this and the fact that the speed problem would not have been alleviated.

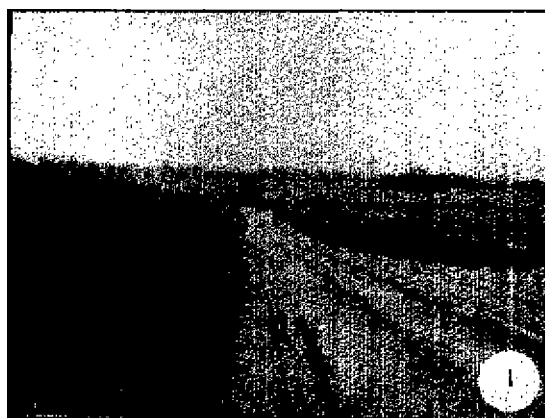
Initial thoughts were the extension of the double white lines along the bend again this could be carried out later but again several factors proved this not to be the ideal solution, one of these being cars would still be able to cross over the line should they misjudge the bend which has been shown to be a major contributory factor.

It was agreed that larger hazard signs would be placed on the approach, as the original ones tended to become hidden by the hedgerows as they grew. In addition, further signs would be added indicating an advisory 40 mph speed limit, the word SLOW would be painted on the road surface and chevron boards placed at the apex of the bend.

This made the bend more visible and highlighted the severity of the bend to motorists on the approach thus hopefully slowing them down and reducing the number of accidents.

This project was attempted to be resolved without any excessive costs involved that would have caused delays in its implementation due to financial constraints imposed on local authorities.

By using the problem analysis triangle and SARA model approach to this problem it became easier to assess.



1. SCANNING.

Accident figures highlighted a large number of serious and fatal road Traffic Collisions that have occurred at a specific section of carriageway on the A5 86 at Larbreck (near to Great Ecclestone). The section of carriageway is unlit and is surrounded by agricultural fields, the road is subject to a mandatory 50mph speed limit.

Due to the open aspects of the area the road can during the winter months be subject to severe frost causing extra hazards for motorists.

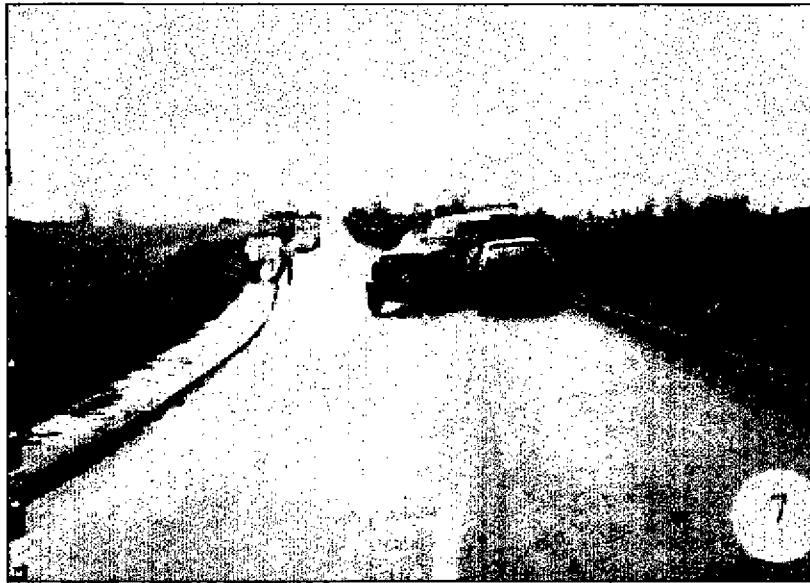
At this section, the road has a sharp bend preceded by a downward gradient. As motorists approach the bend they appear to fail to appreciate the severity of the curve and lose control of their vehicles leaving the carriageway entering the nearby farmers fields.

This causes not only problems for motorists but also affects the farmers who operate the nearby fields causing damage to fencing, crops and also allowing farm animals access to the roadway which causes thither problems for the police.

The main cause of the problem is on the approach to the bend the road signage is of a poor quality and at certain times of the year is hidden by overgrown hedgerows.

2. ANALYSIS.

By accessing accident statistics these clearly show that this bend on the A586 at Larbreck clearly has a problem and will continue to generate injuries/casualties until improvements are made via "engineering."



On the approach to the bend there is clearly poor signage, as a result this section of road is subject to an inordinately high number of serious/ fatal road traffic accidents, which cause distress to victims, relatives, friends and can cost the emergency services time and



money whilst dealing with these incidents.

By using the problem. analysis triangle I found that the location of the bend on a A' class road with poor signage on the approach, particularly when approaching from Great Eccleston, Towards Blackpool was causing problems for all types of Motorists, cars, motorcyclists and large vehicles. It became predictable that accidents would occur mostly being serious injury.

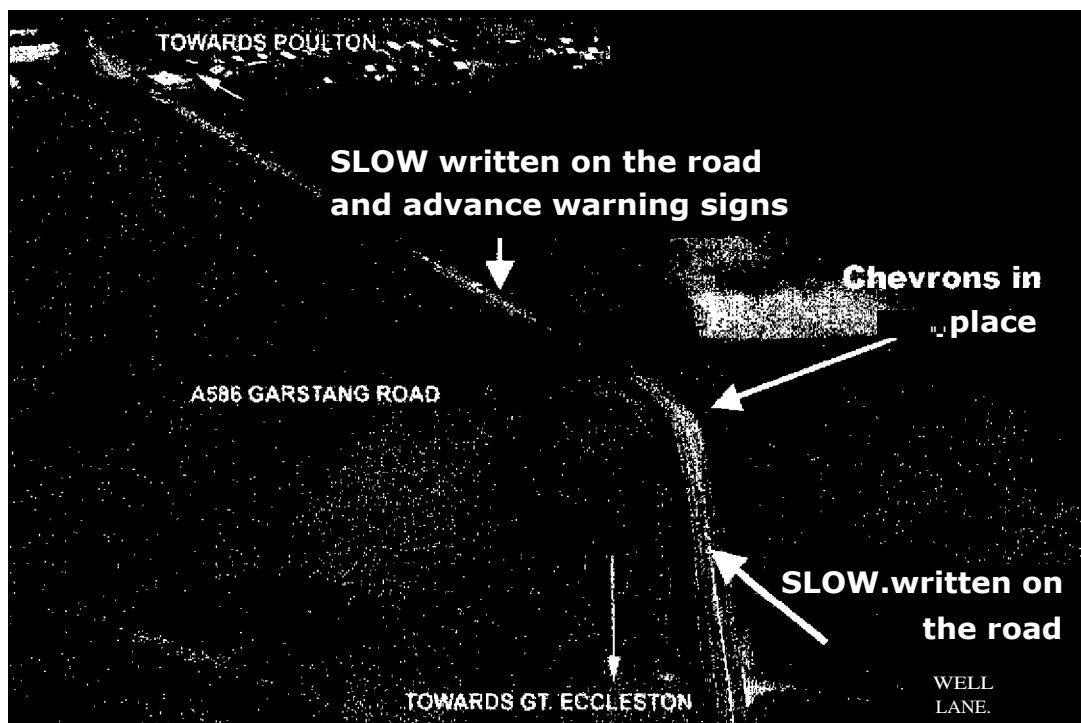
The root cause of the problem being the drivers of the vehicles are not able to negotiate the bend in the road, in some cases this is due to excess speed.

3. RESPONSE.

By assessing the road layout in general and visiting the site comparing other similar bends in the road it was clearly found that there were inconsistencies with other stretches of the A586 with regards to signage. Also to note the levels of compliance with the speed limit.

By submitting a report to the Highways authority, LCC, outlining the problem and requesting a site meeting in order to agree on suitable actions and a time table for implementation.

Initially the ideal solution would be to completely reengineer the roadway and straighten the bend out, this was dismissed on a number of points which included a high cost factor, encouragement of vehicle to continue to use excess speed and inconvenience to locals. Another alternative would be to extend the system of double white line around the bend and consider a mandatory reduction of the speed limit on this road. This would require detailed action by the highways authority and application for an operational order, which



would require planning consent where objections may be received from other parties. This was not completely dismissed at this stage but kept for further consideration should my first response not be successful.

Following a site meeting with Mr David Brandwood-Spencer from the LCC highways department a time scale was agreed in which the changes would be made by. The accident and speed statistics were explained to Mr Brandwood-Spencer who agreed that a problem did in fact exist.

Air support unit were contacted to obtain photographs of the scene and surrounding area. Agreement was reached to reduce the speed limit to 40 mph and erect larger warning signs, chevron boards and paint SLOW on the road.

4. ASSESSMENT.

Eliminating all RTC's at the site would be preferable however RTC's will be monitored over the next six months. It is normal to assess road accident statistics over a five year period to take into account changes in traffic volumes and weather fluctuations. A mild winter will show reductions and the recent fuel dispute provided a unusual reduction in the amount of traffic on the roads and a reduction in accidents

Presently there have been no reported accidents since the road has been reengineered but the area is still being monitored and consideration will be given to other options should they be required. Due to the nature of the changes made they now form part of the street furniture:and will remain in place until changes are made by LCC. The speed limit was reduced by placing voluntary speed limit signs which negated any county council planning requirement sand gave an immediate impact.

As a result of these actions a working relationship has been formed with the LCC and other officers have benefited from seeing the immediate reduction of RTC's as a result other officers are now using the same methodology at other high volume sites.