

20 JUN 2014

Safe roads, reliable journeys, informed travellers

Our ref: 227-14
Your ref: 03784/2013

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18 June 2014

Dear Dr Harrowing,

Thank you for your letter of 28 April 2014, addressed to Graham Dalton, about the inquest into the death of Miss Yasmin Mary Richards and specifically the recommendations made under regulations 28 and 29 of The Coroners (Investigations) Regulations 2013. I am replying while Mr Dalton is away from the office.

In responding to your recommendations, I shall set out the considerable improvement work that has been done on the A46 at this location since 2 November. In addition I shall detail the future intended actions together with a timeline that the Highways Agency intend to pursue.

May I take this further opportunity to extend our sympathies to Miss Richards' family following this tragic incident. The safety of the travelling public is a priority for us and any incident, particularly one as serious as this, is regrettable and a cause for concern. On that basis we continuously monitor our entire network in terms of its condition and safety profile and where appropriate develop engineering solutions.

In 2010/11 we received the A46 Route Safety Study that covered the entire A46 route from M4 Junction 18 into Bath. This report recommended safety improvements to different sections of the route. It acknowledged that in the locality of the Hartley Bends the accidents that occurred were indicative of higher speeds than road conditions would dictate, but recommended that given the short length of road involved, rather than simply apply another short change in posted speed, potentially causing confusion, driver frustration and resulting non-compliance, it would be more effective to use more overt visual methods to improve information for drivers on the hazards they are approaching in order that they drive appropriately.

This recommendation was accepted and, following development of a business case, this safety scheme was included in our forward programme for implementation in early 2014. The salient proposals in the Hartley Bends locality were as follows:

- **Interactive vehicle activated signs (VAS) to be installed on the north and southbound approaches to Hartley Bends. These signs visually are activated by high speed and advise drivers to slow down and of the geometric hazards ahead;**
- **Introduction of high friction surface (HFS) material that will visually highlight the road's geometry and provide improved road holding for vehicles;**
- **Additional hatching to provide separation between opposing traffic streams. (NB this was later deleted from the proposal after evidence emerged that the area to be hatched was consistently overrun and could present a danger to powered two wheelers (PTW);**
- **The provision of yellow backing boards to augment the existing 50 mph signs (NB following discussions with the local Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Board these were removed in favour of the use of larger roundels to achieve the same improvement with reduced environmental impact).**

As previously stated, these works were programmed for early 2014 and therefore after November 2013. However, following 2 November, we took the additional precaution of providing temporary advisory 30 mph signing while we looked into accelerating future road surface renewal works, over and above the planned safety scheme.

I am pleased to say that the road resurfacing and the majority of the safety scheme were completed in May this year. The exception is the VAS signs that have been installed but not switched on, primarily due to construction issues but also to allow us to collect 'before' and 'after' speed information to determine their effectiveness and inform future decisions.

In section 5(3) of your report you make reference to 'rumble strips'. I believe you are referring to yellow bar markings as used on the approaches to roundabouts. These are not considered suitable for use on single carriageway roads as they need to be laid verge to verge in order for their extremities not to cause a hazard to oncoming vehicles and if used on bends such as the A46 can reduce traction for vehicles. There are also adverse environmental effects such as increased noise.

However, high friction surfacing (HFS) can, and has, been laid in strips primarily for increased longevity of the material and improved vehicle traction. This also results in a similar rumble impact for drivers that I believe you envisaged.

I trust you consider the above satisfies points 3 and 4 of section 5 of your report.

In reviewing the 2011 report I still consider that the now implemented local measures to highlight the nature of the road are logical and proactive steps, which may positively affect speeds without the need for a revised posted limit. As regards your recommendation 2 of Section 5 we proposed the following future actions:

1. **A peer review by one of our other service providers not connected with this locality or the original piece of work. This is expected to be completed by the end of July 2014.**

- 2. The gathering of speed data to ascertain the effectiveness of the now implemented safety scheme together with a reasonable period of accident monitoring to gauge impact, and if required, further intervention development. In this case one year would seem appropriate.**

Additionally we have been in contact with Avon and Somerset Police regarding their support of the imposition of a potential reduction in speed in this locality should monitoring and review of the new works indicate that it should be re-considered. The Police have indicated that they would not oppose such a proposal but confirm that it would not be routinely enforced.

The Agency takes its responsibilities seriously in terms of road safety and the competing needs and requirements of our customers. I trust that on this occasion you consider the tangible improvements we have already made since November, together with the commitment to continue to assess the situation, are in accordance with your recommendations.

Yours sincerely



Director

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