

Temple Quay House
2 The Square, Temple Quay
Bristol BS1 6HA

[REDACTED]

Dr Peter Harrowing
The Coroners Court
The Courthouse
Old Weston Rd
Flax Bourton
BS48 1UL

[REDACTED]

30 March 2017

Dear Dr Harrowing

DEATH OF MRS MARGARET JONES-REGULATION "28 REPORT

I write regarding your letter of 22 February 2017 to [REDACTED], our Chief Executive Officer, concerning the unfortunate events of 5th September 2016 on the A36 junction with Branch Road that resulted in the tragic death of Mrs Margaret Jones.

First of all can I extend my deep sympathy to the family of Mrs Jones. Highways England considers the safety of its customers our number one priority and an incident such as this is felt profoundly within the organisation.

In your letter, you refer to four matters of concern including three areas where you consider action should be taken and that Highways England is the organisation that could take action should it be justified.

Accident Profile in the locality of the A36/Branch Road Junction

In terms of the monitoring of accidents in a given locality, five years of accident data is now considered when assessing a problem location and developing an appropriate intervention, as accident profiles can change over time. The profile in recent years has remained stable since 2012 and improved over that of the years before. It is still considered an accident cluster site, but is ranked number 37 in our priority list in the northern part of our South West region.

Please be aware that Highways England has to apply its limited funds in locations where there is an evidenced accident profile and that the intervention progressed must be an appropriate response to accident causation rather than incidents induced by other factors. This is to ensure that the maximum can be achieved in terms of injury savings for the travelling public in the correct locations.

The posted speed limit on the approach to Branch Road and the potential for its reduction

The A36 is a strategic road for the movement of goods and people from ports in the south to the large conurbations and motorway network in the north. As such a balance has to be struck between this strategic function and local operation.

In the locality of Branch Road it is rural in nature. In order to be effective, posted speed limits need to be intuitive and enforceable. That is to say they need to reflect their surroundings in terms of character and be seen by the travelling public as appropriate and reasonable.

In cases where inappropriate speed limits are applied, they are generally not adhered to and in some cases can result in higher speeds as motorists react negatively to something they consider inappropriate. In addition, given the rural locality the Police would find it difficult to enforce a reduced limit here with associated poor compliance.

In localities where there have been accidents, we have to be clear that we identify the correct causation and apply an appropriate solution that is based on evidence and the causation of accidents that are being targeted.

With reference to this incident it seems the Scania vehicle travelling on the A36, based on the assessment in your letter, was traveling at about 35 mph which is significantly below the posted limit. It does not appear excessive speed was a factor on this occasion and a reduction in the posted limit would be unlikely have to avoided or influenced the unfortunate outcome of the incident of the 5th September 2016.

On that basis it would seem inappropriate to reduce the speed limit in a locality where it is unlikely to be adhered to and have any positive effect.

Signing and road markings on the approach to Branch Road

A scheme was completed on 24th November 2015 at Branch Road with the aim of raising the visibility of the Branch Road junction. It comprised the following elements:

- **The introduction of a double white line system to prohibit motorists overtaking**
- **The replacement of two existing “BEND AHEAD” warning signs to also include a junction warning sign on yellow backing boards to raise awareness and the visual profile of the junction for approaching motorists.**
- **SLOW road markings adjacent to the signs.**
- **Red surfacing on the right-turn facilities to discourage encroachment on to them.**
- **New direction signing on passive posts to improve driver awareness and reduce the potential for sudden changes in direction in the locality of the junction.**

- **The trimming of foliage, vegetation and trees to improve visibility through the junction**

The validation of STATS 19 accident data takes some time to come through to us. We do not have a full year of validated accident data after implementation of the scheme in order to determine its effectiveness or otherwise. Normally we undertake Road Safety Audit (RSA) 4a and 4b at 12 months and 36 months respectively to monitor the effect of a scheme on the accident profile.

Appropriate Repairs to High Friction Surfacing

Our maintenance interventions are made on the basis of priority and safety. We have had our pavement specialists inspect the junction recently. The wear of the HFS is immediately opposite the junction, caused by tyre friction associated with vehicles turning off of the A36 and not in the braking zone for approaching vehicles.

It is not currently safety critical and it can reasonably be assumed that at the time of the accident was in better condition that it is now. Following monitoring, a localised temporary repair was recently implemented and a permanent replacement scheme for part of the HFS is being progressed through the normal prioritized value management process.

Conclusion

In summary, the A36 is an evolved rural route and we have in place a realistic speed limit and applied what engineering measures are possible to make the travelling public aware of the risks that they are approaching.

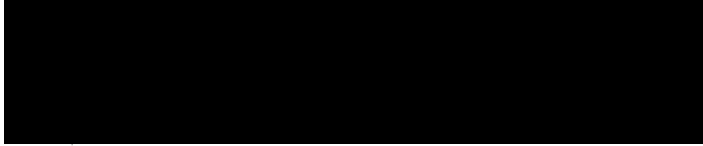
The road surface, specifically the HFS, while showing signs of wear is still fit for purpose and what wear there is can be considered normal and adjacent to the junction rather than in the braking zone. It will of course be monitored and overtime be replaced during our normal cycle of renewals. On that basis I consider we have implemented appropriate repairs and management regimes.

Other factors influenced the tragic events of 5th September 2016 and these were not associated with the physics of the A36 or Branch Road. You have found that the anxiousness of Mrs Jones not to lose sight of her daughter and the possible momentary distraction due to traders opposite the junction were contributory factors to the collision. Given the factors that colluded against Mrs Jones it is difficult to identify any engineering measures that would have prevented this tragedy that were not already in place.

We are of course not complacent and will continue to monitor the locality as we do with our entire network. If the situation changes here we would look to act within our constraints and in an appropriate manner

I trust this information is of use.

Yours sincerely



Team Leader
South West Operations Division - Growth & Improvement Team

