



Network On-Line

December 1999

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November continues to see the Government's Integrated Transport consultations roll on, albeit with some long overdue resistance from the powered road-user community.

Bernard Jenkin MP, Shadow Transport Minister, has been meeting with various road user groups, including MAG, and from these discussions, has been asking some useful questions in Parliament. Coupled together with media and other pressure, such as your letters, it now appears the Government may be taking a step back from the hysterical speed reduction, enforcement, congestion charging and traffic calming measures we responded against so forcibly last month. However, all is not yet done and dusted. We need to keep up the pressure on our National policy makers in order to make our, the electorates, views known.

Some of you wrote to your MP's to ask the three speed and enforcement related questions and the replies so far received are surprisingly honest and open with many admitting to minor speeding offences. Now we are really starting to build a picture of which MP's support us, or otherwise. If you have not yet written, then please do so, before this opportunity finally disappears.

Many of you are in consultation with your local authorities and councils regarding their draft transport plans, which do not particularly favour motorcycling, but neither dismiss it as a valid transport option. This fence sitting appears to be due to lack of positive national guidelines for the authorities to follow, so we have taking this on board as a matter of urgency and are already making representations to Ministers in order to improve this situation.

For those of you who did not manage to attend, the NEC show was a brilliant event. We had a tremendous location and the PR was worth millions. We gave out 25,000 copies of StreetBiker, 15,000 LARGE yellow carrier bags and got noticed all over, to such an extent that the chairman of the BMF commented to Neil Liversidge that our bags were like a rash - they were all over the place - we made our point. MAG Insurance had a really good response with so many calls into the office that they had to move extra staff into their section in the office in Rugby. As I said MAG (UK) was excellent. AMBA Rescue could have been better and WILL be better in the future but the coverage for us overall was top class.

Talking of coverage, if any of you missed Jonathan Dimpleby's recent TV debate, you would have seen Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott telling a live UK audience, in response to a question, that his departments are working with MAG to represent riders' interests. 'Nuff said. If you have articles, reports or comments to stimulate discussion and debate in future Network or Streetbiker, please feel free to submit them as this is the most effective medium for your views to be taken into account and acted upon.

Ride into a Happy Christmas and Merry Millennium,

The Phil Neale

The Automobile Association has produced a report on drivers who choose to drive whilst unlicensed. Figures suggest that whilst 42,000 are driving whilst banned, 1 in 40, or anything up to 800,000 people are driving unlicensed and face a mere 1 in 6 chance of being apprehended. There are many reasons for drivers using unlicensed vehicles, including penalties that are not sufficiently deterrent and peer pressure.

Recent years have seen major changes to the driving test. This has been accompanied by a sudden decline in the number of people learning to drive and presenting themselves for test. It is possible to put this down to

people rushing to take the test before it became harder, to people being scared off by the stricter test, or to people deciding to take the easy way out - driving without taking the test.

The report concludes that further measures are needed to prevent unlicensed driving such as vehicle confiscation, compulsory carrying of photo licenses, and technological solutions such as number plate reading cameras and roadside police access to Driving Standards Agency, DVLA, including licence pictures, as well as their own Police National Computer database facilities, and, of course, to increase penalties for offenders.

Norfolk Chief Constable, Kenneth Williams QPM, underlined these conclusions in a recent conference speech. He wishes to reduce the drink drive limit to 50mg and introduce roadside drug testing. Many forces are already training their officers to recognise the effects of drugs. He went on to call for lower speed limits with increased use of enforcement cameras and pointed out that the Police are moving away from traffic policing to 'road policing'. This is backed up by research which concludes that minor traffic offenders are more likely to be involved in crime elsewhere. However, he suggests that salvage regulations are tightened to prevent vehicles, including motorcycles, from returning to illegal or unsafe use.

THE QUEEN'S SPEECH

At the time of writing the Government's third legislative programme has just been outlined in the Queen's speech:

Transport

A controversial bill, this giant piece of legislation would allow a public-private partnership for National Air Traffic Control, bring in new safety measures for the railways, allow local authorities to introduce road charging and change bus regulation

Local Government

This bill would reform local government with the intention of making it more innovative and accountable.

Freedom of Information

This would create a statutory right to information for the public, but the many exemptions set out by Home Secretary Jack Straw means campaigners regard it as less than satisfactory.

Representation of the People

The Government intends to stimulate falling turnout at elections, this would make it easier for people to register and vote through measures such as mobile and electronic polling stations.

Bills introduced under other measures:

Prosecutions Inspectorate: To create an independent Crown Prosecution Service inspectorate reporting to the attorney general. This will investigate the workings of the Crown Prosecution Service, more details to follow...

LORDY LORDY

The legislative process means that all bills in the House of Commons undergo a First Reading (statement of the bill's intent), Second Reading (to debate the principle of the bill), committee Stage (to make detailed amendments), Report Stage (further amendments) and Third Reading (debate on the amended bill). This process is then duplicated in the Lords.

The Lords Reform Bill removes the entitlements of hereditary peers, to sit and vote in the House of Lords. However, peers will retain their titles and be allowed to pass them on, in addition they will also be given the right to vote in, and stand as candidates for, parliamentary elections. This is the first stage in a 'step-by-step' approach to Lords reform and has reduced the number entitled to vote from 750 to 90, although 499 life peers remain until the next phase of Parliamentary reform.

During the 19th century, the powers of the two Houses were equal. The Lords could and did intervene on, and even reject, every kind of measure, including financial measures. The only weapon of a Prime Minister faced with an intransigent House of Lords was to threaten to ask the monarch to create more Peers of his party. However, the powers of the Lords have been whittled away over the years.

The great Reform Bill of 1832 was designed to end the Lords control over the membership of the Commons. In the 19th century the political divisions between the Tory and increasingly radical Liberal parties grew. Thanks to William Pitt's policy on creations, the Tory Party already enjoyed by that time the entrenched dominance it sustains today. Matters came to a head when the Lords, in defiance of every convention, threw out the 1909 Budget as part of its attack on the radical agenda of Lloyd George. The result was the 1911 Parliament Act. That removed their Lordships' powers to block the passage of Bills passed by the House of Commons for more than two years, except for Bills to extend the life of a Parliament.

Democracy is a crucial ingredient in our society, but it is not the only ingredient that makes up a free society. We were a free country for 250 years before we were a democracy. Freedom involves minority rights as well as majority interests, and the protection of the individual. Will we achieve those things from the interim House that is presented by this Bill?

Time will tell.

The Government has intimated that it hopes to have their plans for second stage for Lords reform finalised by the end of this Parliament. However, it seems most unlikely that it will contemplate legislating until the next Parliament.

GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY BILL

The Government announced in the 1998 Queen's speech, its intention to create a new Greater London Authority made up of a directly elected Mayor and a separately elected Assembly. There will be a range of powers to help make London a world class city, including powers to tackle road congestion and improve public transport.

The referendum held on 7 May 1998 strongly backed the idea of a Mayor and Assembly for the capital - 72% of Londoners who voted, backed the plans. The Mayor and Assembly will be chosen in separate ballots on 4 May 2000. Elections will then take place at four yearly intervals.

A Mayor and Assembly for London, consisting of a directly elected Mayor, and a separately elected Assembly of 25 people will have responsibility for transport, environment, police and health. The GLA will also oversee four "functional bodies" in the capital: The Metropolitan Police Authority, the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, the London Development Agency and Transport for London.

The GLA will be led by the Mayor who will be responsible for devising strategies, the budget, and co-ordination. The Assembly will act as a check on the Mayor, debate strategy and will be able to amend the budget. The GLA will not have law making or tax varying powers and will not be able to extend its remit by referendum.

The GLA will have a budget of over £3 billion (This figure is based on 1997/8 total spending on functions which would transfer to the new Authority) and the Government estimates the GLA will cost £20 million per year to run.

The Bill states that the London Mayor will hold an annual, public, state of London debate and will attend a monthly question time to allow Assembly members to enquire into actions and policies. The Mayor will also hold a twice yearly public meeting with the assembly called a 'People's Question Time'. The White Paper, 'A Mayor and Assembly for London' recognises the validity of the suggestion to establish a Civic Forum to exist alongside the GLA. However, it rejects any such formal statutory obligation to consult with outside bodies and instead recommends a 'general duty to consult interested parties'.

The Mayor of London will be elected by the Supplementary Vote system, if there are 3 or more candidates. Under SV, voters mark their first and second choice of candidate. If no candidate wins more than 50% of the vote, all candidates, except the top two, are eliminated. The second choices of the eliminated candidates are examined and redistributed amongst the remaining candidates. The winning candidate is the one with the most votes after redistribution of second choices.

The 25 member Assembly will be elected by the Additional Member System. 14 "constituency members": will be elected by First Past the Post, and 11 "London members": will be selected from closed party lists to ensure a more proportional result. Once the Mayoral candidates are finally selected MAG will be asking each candidate a set of motorcycling related questions to ascertain their views and to educate and inform them on motorcycling and related matters. WATCH THIS SPACE!

'EVERYBODY DOES IT ROUND HERE'

Mr. David Kidney MP for Stafford North asked what percentage of disqualifications for causing death by dangerous driving and dangerous driving had resulted in retests and extended retests. The number has increased from 4 in 1991 to 99 by 1997, the latest year figures were available. Taking into account there were a total of 192,387 disqualifications in 1997 and 42,452 convictions for driving whilst disqualified the courts do not appear to be using this option as they might. It is estimated that up to 370,000 drivers may be disqualified at one time and a study conducted in 1991 showed that 27% of these admitted to driving whilst disqualified, which means that up to 90,000 drivers may be driving whilst disqualified.

2 Nov 1999: Cyclists' Helmets

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): I beg to move, That leave be given to bring in a Bill to promote the wearing of protective headgear by cyclists; and for connected purposes.

The impetus for the Bill comes from parents in my constituency who are keen for their children to ride bicycles, as it is good for their health, independence and confidence, and good for the environment, but want them to wear cycle helmets while they do so. While children are young, they are quite prepared to wear cycle helmets. However, just when they reach an age at which they are more independent, and it is possible for them to go out on their own and to cycle to school, they will not wear one. Parents, therefore, will not let them cycle, particularly to school. Many children have bikes. Nevertheless, although 90 per cent

of junior school children in England own bikes, only one in four are allowed to use a bike as a mode of transport, rather than as merely something on which to play, and only one in 100 use a bike to go to school. Part of the reason for those figures has been elicited by a safe kids campaign organised by the Child Accident Prevention Trust. When mothers were asked what they feared most for their children's safety, 41 per cent. said road accidents involving cyclists or pedestrians.

Annually, about 200 cyclists are killed and 4,500 are seriously injured on Britain's roads. It is, therefore, understandable that parents should impose severe restrictions on their children's use of cycles on public roads. Moreover, the peak ages for cycling-related deaths are five to 24. About 70 per cent. of those killed and 50 per cent. of those seriously injured suffered serious head injury. However, several studies have indicated that wearing a cycle helmet reduces head injuries.

In an often-quoted study--which was reported in the British Medical Journal, in 1994--all cycle accident admissions to Addenbrooke's hospital, Cambridge were recorded over one year. Cambridgeshire has a higher proportion than most counties of those who cycle, and was therefore particularly appropriate for use in the study. The study showed that there were no significant differences between the type of accidents involving helmet wearers and non-helmet wearers, thereby refuting suggestions that helmet wearers are either more reckless or more careful than other cyclists.

The study also showed that there were no differences between the types of injuries sustained--with the exception of head injuries. The fact is that 4 per cent. of helmet wearers sustained injuries, compared with 11 per cent. of non-wearers. Moreover, as the sample size was so large, the results were highly significant. Adjusted results show a protective factor of 3.25 for wearing a helmet. In other words, the odds of head injury were significantly

reduced--by a factor of three--for those wearing a helmet. Additionally, the injuries sustained by those wearing a helmet were less severe. All patients in the study who sustained severe brain injury, including the two deaths that occurred, had not been wearing helmets.

I want to encourage cycling. Our children are becoming less fit, and there is growing concern about childhood obesity. There is also increasing concern about the traffic

4 Nov 1999 : Airbags

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research he has carried out in the last five years regarding the effects of airbags in reducing casualties and fatalities in car accidents; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hill: Between 1993 and 1996, the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) investigated airbag effectiveness at the Department's request. This included a review of published research on airbag testing and performance in the field. By necessity, this was based mainly on the experience in the US, where airbags have been in use for a number of years. TRL also looked at a sample of accidents in the UK, but the number available for examination was small and there was insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion on the efficacy of airbags in cars in the UK.

The Department, in collaboration with the motor industry, is actively involved in the Co-operative Crash Injury Study (CCIS), which collects detailed information on many aspects of crash protection from a sample of UK road accidents. CCIS is an ongoing study managed by the TRL and involving teams from Birmingham University, Loughborough University and the Vehicle Inspectorate. A study of available CCIS data by Loughborough University published in 1998 concluded that, of all the injured drivers they looked at, those in airbag equipped vehicles had less head injuries, but more arm injuries, than those in vehicles without airbags.

The relatively low number of cases involving airbag deployment is still a constraint in assessing the effectiveness of airbags. However, we anticipate that a clearer picture will begin to emerge as the number of CCIS investigations involving airbag equipped vehicles increases.

9 Nov 1999: Fuel Duty Escalator

Mr. John Swinney (North Tayside): I thank the Chancellor for his refreshing honesty in admitting at last that the fuel duty escalator is about raising taxes and not about the environment. Does he understand the anger that he will provoke in Scotland by continuing to apply a fuel duty escalator, and does he sympathise with the annoyance that there will be because the money that has been collected will not be used for new investment in our public services in Scotland? It was vital for such investment to be announced in the pre-Budget report.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman is wrong on both counts. It is the Scottish National party's plans that would increase taxes in Scotland. It fought an election campaign on increasing the rate of tax. Taxes are falling through the Government's actions; taxes would have risen under Scottish National policies. The party's failure to promote its policy successfully is one of the reasons for the Labour Administration in the Scottish Parliament.

On the hon. Gentleman's second point, moneys will go on road and public transport in the whole of the United Kingdom, which includes Scotland and will continue to do so.

10 Nov : Road Accidents

Mr. Opik: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many accidents have been recorded so far in 1999 involving motorcycles; and how many of these were also recorded in the category signifying the presence of oil or diesel on the road surface at the site of the accident. [96973]

Mr. Hill: Data on the presence of oil or diesel on the road at the site of injury accidents involving motorcyclists has been collected for the first time this year. Early indications are that the number of accidents involving motorcycles where oil or diesel was present is a very small proportion of the overall motorcycle accident figure. Full data will be available when "Road Accidents Great Britain 1999" is published in September 2000.

Insulin (Drivers)

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what evidence the Government have based their conclusion that drivers using insulin are less safe than others.

Mr. Hill [holding answer 22 November 1999]: I have been asked to reply. The driving licence treatment of those with diabetes treated by insulin is based primarily on European legislation--the Second Driving Licence Directive (91/439/EEC). This provided for licensing restrictions on those with insulin-treated diabetes, in particular in respect of driving heavier vehicles, based on risks associated with insulin treatment. This can lead to a hypoglycaemic attack which in turn can lead to loss of consciousness without

Transport Consultation Documents

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many transport consultation documents have been issued since May 1997; and how many are currently in consultation.

Mr. Hill: We have issued 237 consultation papers with deadlines for responses since May 1997. Sixteen of these remain open.

22nd November: Fuel Duty

Mr Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer

(1) what measures he will take to ensure that ring-fenced revenues from any real terms increases in fuel duties can be identified as additional to normal departmental spending on public transport and roads;

(2) which real terms increases in fuel duty will be ring-fenced in a fund for public transport and road modernisation, as set out in his Pre-Budget Report.

Mr. Timms: The Chancellor announced in his Pre-Budget Report that the revenues from any real terms increases in road fuel duties will, in future, go straight to a ring-fenced fund for improving public transport and modernising the road network,

Ring-fenced revenues from any real terms increase in fuel duties will be additional to the spending plans set for the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions in spending reviews.

Additional ring-fenced spending will be identified as such in future DETR Annual Report and Expenditure Plans.

PRESCOTT PLUGS MAG

John Prescott has hit back at the "poll tax on wheels" jibe levelled at car charges set out in the Queen's Speech.

In a live TV interview with Jonathan Dimbleby, the deputy prime minister insisted new charges would be spent on public transport and motorists would simply have more choice.

MAG had three representatives in the 80-strong studio audience, and we managed to ask how, despite the current lack of progress, motorcycles were to be included in integrated transport policies.

Prescott pointed to the bikes in bus lanes scheme in his native Hull, and mentioned his continuing dialogue with MAG. And he promised he would not force local authorities to implement his proposals for new driving tolls, but reminded us of the importance to make our views heard locally. But he admitted most local authorities would probably not be keen to burden road users with new charges, although he argued those that had pursued novel transport policies had reaped rewards.

The Transport Bill is the centrepiece of the coming year's legislative programme. It wraps together plans to allow local councils to levy road and parking charges with the part-privatisation of air traffic control and measures to improve the railways.

Mr Prescott, claimed critics who had sniped at his apparent inability to get transport reform on the parliamentary timetable before were simply wrong.

But facing yet another backlash from the press - with headlines predicting "road rage" and "war on motorists" - he argued the government had to take brave decisions. "You can't sit and do nothing - that would be the worst solution for the motorist," he said.

He argued those behind the furious response to the road tolls proposals would be shouting about gridlock on the roads if nothing had been done.

"It's the same people who realise that the congestion is getting worse and they want to see the improvement in public transport."

"They want to have the choice first before they are forced to pay any more."

On the timing of the Transport Bill, Mr Prescott insisted he had agreed with the prime minister that it would not come before the third year of the Blair government.

"BRAKING" NEWS ON ASBESTOS BAN!

The motor industry bids farewell to the use of asbestos today, as the ban on the supply, manufacture and importation of white asbestos comes into force in the UK.

The ban, which extends to all domestic products, means that it is now illegal to supply or fit asbestos brake linings to vehicles registered after 1 January 1973. It also applies to clutches and gaskets containing asbestos, regardless of the vehicle's age.

But gaskets containing compressed asbestos fibre (CAF), can still be used with toxic and flammable substances until 1 January 2001, when substitutes will have to be used.

NATIONWIDE DRINK-DRIVE REHABILITATION SCHEME INTRODUCED

Courts will be given new powers to send drink-drivers to rehabilitation centres, Transport Minister Lord Whitty announced.

From 1 January 2000, the Drink-Drive Rehabilitation Scheme - which has run on an experimental basis since 1993 - will become permanent throughout Great Britain, the latest measure in the Government's campaign against drink-driving.

People convicted of drink-driving offences are normally disqualified from driving for at least 12 months, but the new scheme allows courts to refer offenders to rehabilitation centres, with the incentive that their disqualification may be reduced by up to a quarter if they complete the course successfully. People who attend rehabilitation courses are three times less likely to re-offend than those who do not, research carried out for the DETR during the experimental period suggests.

Lord Whitty said:

"This scheme will play an important role in our long-term campaign to reduce drink-drive casualties and the rate of offending."

"Rehabilitation courses are not a soft option. All courses and the organisations providing them are Government-approved, and offenders are required to pay the costs of their courses themselves." The Drink-Drive Rehabilitation Scheme will be made permanent throughout Great Britain by means of The Courses for Drink-Drive Offenders (Experimental Period) (Termination of Restrictions) Order 1999, which was approved by the House of Lords on Friday 29 October. The House of Commons approved it on 26 July 1999.

The experimental scheme has been monitored through research carried out by the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) for the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. TRL Report 426, "Drink/driver rehabilitation courses in England and Wales" has been published today and is available, priced

£35, from the Transport Research Laboratory, Old Wokingham Road, Crowthorne, Berkshire RG45 6AU (Tel: 01344 773131).

Up to June 1999, 30 organisations had been approved to administer courses. 1,242 courses had been run involving 12,592 offenders. A national representative association (ADDAPT) acts as a focal point for course organisers (contact Graham Wynne, c/o TTC, Grosvenor House, Central Park, Telford TF2 9TW. Tel: 01952 292246).

GOVERNMENT'S MILLENNIUM DRINK DRIVE CAMPAIGN

Lord Whitty, Minister for Roads will launch the Government's final drink drive campaign of the century on Wednesday, 1 December. He will be joined by Paul Manning, Assistant Commissioner and Chairman of Association of Chief Police Officers Traffic Committee.

A new series of powerful TV commercials will feature in the £2.6m campaign, as well as poster and magazine advertising. The campaign rolls out nationally on December 1st.

Lord Whitty will also unveil a new TV commercial specially created for the Millennium which goes out from December 27 - 29.

Last year drink driving claimed the lives of 460 people on Britain's roads. It continues to be a serious road safety problem. Even one drink affects driving ability.

BULL BAR EARLY DAY MOTION

You may be interested to know that MP's Paul Flynn and Jeremy Corbyn have introduced an Early Day Motion (EDM) on banning bull bars.

The EDM is number 9 of 17/11/99

'That this House welcomes the reduction in pedestrian injuries following the introduction of vehicles with flexible fronts that absorb the shock of collision; but regrets that there has been no ban on the macho fashion accessories of bull bars that concentrate and multiply the force of collision at the level of a child's head and vital organs'

It is not MAG's policy to actively campaign against bull bars, but as many of you hold strong views on this issue you can write to your MP individually asking them to support the EDM if you so choose.

Phil

MAG'S VIEW:

BULL BARS ON VEHICLES

MAG UK is opposed to the fitment of bull-bars to vehicles. However, we do not intend to actively campaign against them for the following reasons:

- * MAG UK are reluctant to call for the banning of equipment that is not conclusively proven to exacerbate injuries in the event of a collision. Following this course of action may lead to similar calls or measures being made against motorcycles and their accessories.
- * Bull-bars have already received much bad press; many of the arguments are emotive from accident victims, bereaved relatives of accident victims or from politicians and safety groups eager to be seen to be doing something. The general public and vehicle manufacturers are already known to be aware of and dealing with this issue.
- * Being involved with a campaign not based on scientific evidence is likely to undermine MAG's credibility.
- * The fitment of bull-bars is likely to be banned or seriously curtailed by EU legislation without any intervention by MAG UK.
- * There are so many other safety issues to be dealt with, such as diesel spillages, poor road surfaces, accident prosecution policy and rider training that campaigning against bull-bars would detract from this work.
- * MAG UK considers that it is more important to prevent accidents from happening in the first instance rather than assuming that they are going to happen and to mitigate their effects by 'softening' vehicle fronts. The emphasis should be on prosecuting the perpetrators of accidents, rather than campaigning against specific equipment or accessories.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BILL WILL REVITALISE LOCAL DEMOCRACY

Legislation which will radically change how local communities govern themselves and shape their future has been published, as the Government continues to drive forward its agenda to revitalise local democracy and modernise public services.

The Local Government Bill will give local people the opportunity to elect a mayor to run their council. Local communities will have modern local governance, with powerful new roles for all councillors. To make councils more efficient, transparent and accountable, all the new council structures will make it clear who makes the decisions that affect people's everyday lives.

The Bill also includes proposals for a new ethical framework for councillors and employees.

PARLIAMENTARY ADVISORS

The Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety (PACTS) has been presented with a report on rural safety management which calls for lower speed limits on all rural roads. This suggests lowering speed limits from the present 60mph to 50mph on class B roads and from 60mph to 40mph on Class C roads.

NEW PLANNING WEBSITE LAUNCHED BY THE DETR

A definitive list of Government planning policy guidance has been launched on the Internet by the DETR.

In answer to a parliamentary question from Angela Smith MP (Basildon), Planning Minister Nick Raynsford said:

"I have today published a list of current planning policy guidance on the Department's website at <http://www.databases.detr.gov.uk/planning/npp/>"

This list, which is the first of its kind, will be a useful tool for local authorities, planners, developers, academics and the general public. Besides listing the guidance contained in Departmental Circulars, Planning Policy Guidance Notes, Minerals Policy Planning Notes and Regional Planning Guidance Notes, the list will also include key statements to Parliament, a list of research reports and best practice advice published by the Department. We shall update the list as and when new guidance is issued or existing guidance is modified.

"This initiative is a practical demonstration of the Government's policy to increase substantially the volume of business transacted by electronic means."

WRITING TEAM

I am working on the next issue of Streetbiker at the same time as this one i.e. Dec/Jan and Feb/Mar at the same time. That way I hope I may be able to take a couple of weeks off over the new year. I plan to create a small team of journalists as I have a small team of artists email activists and photographers, actually on checking my helpers database I find I already have a few but I could do with a few more. This will have the advantage of not only liberating more of my time so I can do more PR work but will provide more 'voices' in the paper which is a good thing. If I can get features written months in advance then this gives me the time to get articles proof read way in advance and also afford more time to spend on better design. I have proof reading volunteers already but the problem is that with the final few weeks work on the paper proving so hectic I don't have the time to send the proof readers the copy, get it back and replace the original text with it.

Every half an hour counts at that stage of the schedule. You may think that with modern technology this is nonsense and all I have to do is go copy paste and copy paste again when the text returns but in practise things seldom run that smoothly, and minor hitches at a critical time can become major problems.

It's like all areas of technology. One hears that the American s have radar that can spot a mouse move on the moon and then ask why a missile hits the wrong city. Abdul bin liner (with the greatest of respect to our Islamic fundamentalist members), probably thinks it's a deliberate act of international terrorism perpetuated by the imperialist burger eaters but when you've used radar for years, albeit slightly less sophisticated versions, you can see how these things happen. Ships have radar and still bash into each other from time to time, I almost missed New Zealand once and had to turn around come back before Emperor penguins started squeezing through the port holes. All this gear is only as good as its operator.

Take Mark Iline's offer of doing the meetings page; all credit to Mark Iline!!!! but what happens is that he updates the page in word (he doesn't have Quark Express and at £800 plus it isn't worth buying it for him just to do this job) so back comes the correct page but when I paste it into Quark all the bold instructions are lost so I have to go through 150 plus meetings changing all the headings to bold, then there are the regional black blocks which are created in Quark and have to be individually inserted. It's all possible but it takes valuable time up at a time when I have least time. Advance planning is the way to go.

Now here's the next few issue themes:

April/May: Security

June/July: Touring/camping

Aug/Sep: Customs

I want more input from users of gear rather than just manufacturers glowing claims, so if you have a security product that you have used for a while and can make some useful comments about - fling it this way. Likewise camping apparatus or tips. Always remember that humour is helpful. Incidentally I've got some knee sliders here from a company called Sox , anybody want to play them? They seem very strange to me and to be honest, failing another encounter with virgin olive oil, I think my own use for them is going to be limited.

If I get this team of writers together then I will probably ask specific people to write specific things on specified objects or activities as I appreciate that general appeals leave everyone feeling that someone else will probably do it.

You could put this in Network to if you like The Phil Neale.!!!

DRIVING LICENCE REVIEW

EU Governments want to restrict access to big bikes

Very worrying news come from EU governments whose experts almost unanimously support a minimum age of 24, or even 25 years, to have direct access to all categories of bikes.

EU experts are also opposing the possibility for car drivers to ride on A1 machines (up to 125cc). Another criteria, the A2 category, gets support from a slight majority, being machines up to 650cc, with a power of 35kW and a power/weight ratio of 0.22kW/kg. These machines would be directly accessible from the age of 18 years with theoretical and practical tests, A1 licence holders would be required to only pass the practical test.

Governments take this stepped access approach because of the potential danger of young motorcyclists riding on supersport bikes. FEMA thinks that such a measure should not be taken if no safety evidence shows that it will help reduce accidents.

FEMA also supports car drivers' access to A1 machines, this would partly solve mobility problems and allow families with moderate financial resources to afford a second vehicle for commuting between home and work.

Other points which are generally supported by governments' experts include harmonisation of a moped licensing system, access of A1 category (up to 125cc/11 kW) from 16 years old.

These views have been expressed in discussions with the European Commission (EC) on the review of the Second Directive on the European Driving Licence, based on the CIECA (European Association of Examiners) proposal drafted at the request of the EC.

Though this review is only intended to get common agreement on the harmonisation of sub-categories, the EC's objective is to have this Directive thoroughly reviewed in order to draft a Third Directive.

Currently, motorcyclists' organisations are discussing the subject in detail with their national governments in order to push for a more flexible approach on the points we are concerned of.

The FEMA position supports access to mopeds from 14 years of age with appropriate training and a provisional entitlement to ride, A1 category from 16 years of age with practical test, direct access to all categories of bikes from 18 years old after training and testing, and car drivers to have access to A1 category of bikes.

Concerned motorcyclists are welcome to give their comments or suggestions to FEMA or through their national motorcyclists' organisations.

For more information, contact FEMA.

The text of the Second European Driving Licence Directive is available on Internet:

http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/lif/dat/1991/en_391L0439.html

MILWARD'S MILLENNIUM RIDE

Hello Everyone

Well it is only a matter of weeks before departure for me now, and you are all welcome to come to a little leaving party on Saturday 11th December.

In fact it will be a tour of some of Brussels best hostelryes.

Regarding my en-route email updates, would you like to receive them? These go to sponsors and most of you have not yet sponsored :(, - its only 10 euro - but indirectly you are all sponsors anyway because the FEMA committee gave me the sabbatical.

Take care and I'll see you in 2001.

Simon

<http://www.millennium-ride.com/>

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