



Shakespeare Business Centre
245a Coldharbour Lane
London SW9 8RR

info@roadpeace.org
www.roadpeace.org
Tel: 020 7733 1603

Safety cameras: base policy on evidence, not opinion

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Which?'s article (Half of Speed Cameras don't work at any one time) serves to highlight the dangers of ill-informed organisations joining a bandwagon. They report that many fixed cameras are not always collecting evidence for penalties and suggest that because public opinion is set against cameras that they represent a poor policy option.

That all fixed cameras do not actively collect evidence for penalties has been well known amongst both road safety campaigners and the anti-camera brigade for quite some time. RoadPeace first highlighted the difference between camera sites and active cameras in our 2005 Safety Camera Briefing Pack, but this distinction has not always been properly appreciated by the media. The misreporting around cameras led to them being described as 'the MMR of transport'.

When not active, fixed speed cameras are no different than vehicle-activated signs; they still flash when the driver has exceeded the speed limit and thus inform them of the need to slow down.

Their effectiveness at reducing road traffic casualties, highlighted in the annual evaluation most recently by the RAC Foundation and the Cochrane Collaboration, is then all the more impressive, in light of the reduced numbers of hours of operation.

The second point is the need for policy to be based on evidence and not opinion. Customer satisfaction is good for choosing shampoos, but not for life saving interventions; those whose lives who are saved by the reduction of speeding will never be aware of it, those penalised for speeding know it too well, and so they should. That drivers do not like being penalised for breaking the law should come as no surprise to anyone (if they liked it, it wouldn't be much of a penalty).

Stick to shampoos, Which?

Background

RoadPeace Safety Camera Briefing:

http://roadpeace.org/resources/RoadPeace--How_cameras_can_help_reduce_speeding.PDF

RAC Foundation: <http://www.racfoundation.org/research/safety/effectiveness-of-speed-cameras>

Cochrane Collaboration: <http://www2.cochrane.org/reviews/en/ab004607.html>

For further information contact:

RoadPeace

Amy Aeron-Thomas, Executive Director:

020 7733 1603 during office hours

07905 847917 outside office hours