

February 2009

Free business breakfast offering free training for businesses

Road crashes involving business drivers either at-work or commuting results in losses amounting to £billions throughout the UK. It's a problem that Devon doesn't escape, with up to a third of incidents and prosecutions on the county's roads involving drivers on work related journeys. At a time when businesses need to reduce uninsured losses and protect their margins Devon County Council has won funding from central government to help local employers deal with this problem - and at no cost to the company!



The Devon Country Mile project aims to reduce crashes and casualties on some of the county's rural network - specifically the area between Exeter and Barnstaple, bordered by the A361, the A377 and the A396.



Does your business operate in this area? Do your drivers regularly use these roads? If so then your business qualifies for free support from the project in the form of advice, guidance and practical training.

A free business breakfast is being held at the George Hotel, South Molton on Thursday 12 February from

8am to 10am. Mike Hull, who leads the driver training wing of this £1.5m project, says "I'd encourage any business owners, fleet or safety managers to attend so that they can learn more about protecting their drivers and businesses from expensive losses - and to find out how the project can provide them with practical support. The breakfast event, like our support, is free of charge and places are limited so I'd advise those interested to call the Devon Drivers' Centre on 01392 444773 today to reserve their place."

Country Mile preliminary survey results

Before Country Mile was launched, preliminary groundwork included a survey in which 601 interviews were conducted with residents in a representative 'spread' of towns and villages inside the project area boundaries. Most were conducted on doorsteps, amongst a group broadly representative of 'car-owners' in the area. Over 60% were in the age range 25-64, and the group had a female bias: men were rather reluctant to participate in this survey. Nonetheless, most of those interviewed were car-drivers, and because of the age range involved, most had also held a licence for quite a lengthy period.

The most popular 'boundary' road proved to be the A377 Exeter-Barnstaple route, with all the A- and rural roads being used most regularly for personal and leisure journeys. Though accounted for to some extent by the high proportion of 16-24 year olds surveyed in the Barnstaple and Crediton areas, this age group showed the highest usage of the A377. This road is the natural link between the key employment centres of Exeter and Barnstaple, so the result is consistent with them being likely users of the route for commuting purposes.



An evaluation of the 'green shared road' sign yielded high levels of comprehension, and also an indication that a majority would change their driving behaviour as a result of seeing it. Actions might be 'slowing down' or driving with greater 'care' and 'caution.' This willingness to change driving behaviour largely came through their interpretation of the sign as showing 'hazards' and the use of a 'shared road'. Few were unable to understand the sign, although some were confused by its green colour and/or the inclusion of the National Speed Limit sign. However, many claimed to already exhibit due care and caution on rural roads, and therefore would not change their behaviour as a result of seeing this sign.

When asked about vehicle speeds, over 60% were able to correctly state the National Speed Limit for a car travelling on a single carriageway, but considerably fewer could correctly state the limits for large HGV's, or cars towing a trailer. Correct identification of speed limits was higher amongst younger respondents, and those having more recently gained a licence. Almost 40% who had held a licence for over 11 years stated an incorrect maximum limit for a car, which perhaps suggests a greater educational need as one becomes a more mature driver.

When relating speed to road safety and perceived danger almost half of the sample deemed 'speeding' - vehicles driving too fast - to be the most 'dangerous' aspect of driving on Devon's rural roads. Females in particular identified speeding as the 'primary' danger in driving Devon's rural roads. Other 'secondary' dangers were raised by only 20% of the sample or less. A greater proportion of commuters/business travellers claimed 'worn/defective road surfaces' to be a danger, which may be related to the more frequent nature of their travel.

Amongst the total sample, some 20% had, at some time, experienced a collision – or 'a near miss' - in their local area. Despite this, and a majority identifying a number of 'dangers' encountered when driving Devon's roads, most rated themselves as very confident driving around their local area. This suggests that although, when prompted, respondents were able to identify the dangers of driving on rural roads, in isolation these are insufficient to affect driver 'confidence' They would appear to be confident because they see themselves as being aware. In the survey, confidence itself is only significantly lower amongst those driving for less than a year - as might be expected. Likewise little differentiation emerged between perceived 'safety' in driving country roads when compared with city roads or dual carriageways, on which respondents rated themselves on average as feeling 'quite safe'.

Half of the respondents then went on to name particular roads on which they felt 'unsafe.' As the question had been 'prompted', this may have encouraged respondents to detail roads where they had encountered speeding problems. However, other questioning revealed that despite awareness of 'speeding,' this doesn't necessarily mean those surveyed feel unsafe.

When asked to rank driving "offences," consistent with findings elsewhere in the survey, when prompted 'speeding' was deemed the most common offence - but 'drink driving' was perceived as the most serious and the cause of many collisions. 25-44 year olds (and notably females) were considerably more likely to deem 'drink driving' the most serious offence, though this sentiment decreased with age. 16-24 year olds however were unique in that 20% of them deemed 'driving whilst using a mobile phone' (without a hands-free kit) the most serious offence.

When asked on which offence the Police should focus most attention, views were spread between speeding, drink-driving, and driving whilst using a mobile phone (without a hands-free kit) these answers were affected by the age of the driver and the reasons they were making their journey. An important finding is that the likelihood of claiming the police should focus attention on 'drink-driving' decreases with age, and conversely increases with age (and driving experience) for 'speeding'. So, the most likely to speed (16-24 year olds) are the least likely to claim the police should focus on this. So it seems that the more likely the driver was to commit an offence the less likely they were to want to see that offence enforced.

There is some indication from the survey that the A3072 may have more prominent speeding problems – inferred by 50% of its main users, who stated the Police should focus most attention on speeding. Although public perception is that a lot more can be still be 'done' to control speeding - only 6% of the total sample believed any driver would be 'very' likely to be detected speeding on the project A roads.

If you have experience of using the A377, the A361, the A396, the A3072 and all the roads that lie between them, then we would like to hear your views about what is good, what is less good and what improvements can be made email us at countrymile@devon.gov.uk.

You can read more about the background to the Country Mile project at www.devon.gov.uk/countrymile.

Community thoughts at the start of Devon's Country Mile

Attendees at the Country Mile launch at Eggesford had some interesting and sometimes quite forthright views about road safety matters within the target area. The issues raised summarise broadly into five separate, often closely interlinked and familiar areas: speed, road signing, driver education, road design and maintenance - and problems specific to rural roads.

Issue one: Road Signing

A level of consistency in signing and lining roads was felt important, and there were comments too about the overall number of signs in use and their effectiveness in influencing road users. Suggestions included the introduction of signs providing information on the number and type of collisions on specific routes, as seen elsewhere in the country, and extending the steadily growing usage of vehicle activated signs. It was felt these might be useful tools to address another concern - signing the dangers associated with taking risks.

The story so far:

A route review due for completion in spring 2009 is considering issues of appropriate and consistent signing on both the A377 Crediton to Barnstaple road, and the A361 North Devon Link.

Issue two: Speed

Launch attendees singled out various speed related matters for comment. The A377 was mentioned in relation to a need for consistency of applied speed limits, and there were calls for a less ambiguous approach to the general management of speed. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the wish list contained requests for more enforcement of speed limits in places where excessive speeds were perceived as a problem - and there were concerns too over the speed of larger vehicles when using rural lanes.

The story so far:

A general review of speed limits on all Devon's 'A' and 'B' roads is currently under way, with a report due during 2009. Separately, the A377 review already mentioned is due to make recommendations for improved speed management on that route. In a wider context, during the course of the Country Mile project, historic and current data and evidence is being collated, to identify locations where appropriate speed management schemes might be used to good effect. Although not specifically mentioned by attendees as a speed-related issue, the proposed Green Zone scheme is intended to take things a step further - as an effective measure in rural environments to promote greater general awareness of vulnerable road users.

Issue three: Driver education

There was a feeling that driver skills could be improved, particularly in the case of younger drivers, motorcycle riders and vulnerable road users. Another issue raised was that some effort be put into marketing of advanced driver schemes such as those operated by RoSPA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents) and the IAM (Institute of Advanced Motorists)

The story so far:

The intention is to direct drivers to road safety groups and relevant training schemes as part of the education, training and publicity plan within the Country Mile project. Groups known to be particularly at risk are being targeted within the project's overall marketing campaign, and a dedicated Community Driver Instructor is already available to provide training and advice throughout the area.

Issue four: Road design and maintenance

Extension of the dual carriageway section of the A361 was suggested. There have been several calls for the A361 to be dualled in the years since it opened. Hand in hand with this was another comment, concerning drivers' frustration with slow-moving vehicles on the single carriageway sections of the route where overtaking is not permitted. There were also concerns about the efficiency of response to road surface defects.

The story so far:

Devon County Council's A361 route safety assessment is due to report in early 2009. Additionally, the Country Mile project brief includes the reviewing and recommendation of route enhancements. The review will consider the introduction of further suitable passing places where these are practical, though more major schemes are not possible within the Country Mile funding package. Road surface problems and carriageway defects generally can be reported through the established 'See it, Report it' scheme on 0845 1551004, and a structured recording and reaction policy already exists to effect carriageway repairs. However, since this general area was a concern amongst those attending the launch, raising awareness of the reporting procedures is certainly a possibility within the scope of the Country Mile project.

Issue five: Rural roads

Away from the more heavily trafficked routes, attendees raised an equestrian concern: that of road surface quality, which can in some circumstances be a problem for shod horses. There was a generally positive reaction to the prototype 'Green Zone' signs, which brought

forth the comment that they might usefully be extended outside predominantly rural areas on to 'A' roads.

The story so far:

British Horse Society road surface dressing guidelines form part of Devon County Council highways policy, while the Horses and Highway Surfaces report contains self-help guidelines for equestrians. At the current early stage of its development, the Green Zone scheme is intended and designed to be site specific, and therefore not, at present, suitable for 'A' class roads.

Contact us

If you would like any further information on any aspect of the Country Mile project then please do email us at countrymile@devon.gov.uk or you can write to us at:


Devon Country Mile Project, Road Safety and Travel Awareness, Devon County Council, Lucombe House, County Hall, Topsham Road, Exeter, EX2 4QW

Why not forward this e-newsletter to a friend or colleague who may also be interested in our work?



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