



People for Proper Policing in North Wales

WLGA, HGVs and cycling.

Brunstrom's blog Friday, October 27, 2006

Yesterday was different. I gave a (very) short speech at the Welsh Local Government Association Annual Conference in Llandudno in the morning, and then spent the afternoon with **Tamsin Dunwoody AM, the Deputy Minister for Economic Development & Transport in the Welsh Assembly Government**. One of the absolutely invaluable benefits of devolution is that it is now possible for Ministers to get close to real problems, to gain real hands on knowledge and experience in a way which is almost impossible from London.

I took her to see two things. Firstly we visited **Operation Mermaid, the joint police/VOSA road check process** which was in full swing at Dalar Hir, on the A55 on Anglesey. VOSA (the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency: www.vosa.gov.uk) are the people with prime responsibility for enforcement of the law in relation to goods' vehicles; in North Wales we operate very closely with them - one of the reasons that we score '**Excellent**' for road policing.

We spent over an hour on site, in a fierce wind. The place was going like a chippy, as the saying has it. We set Mermaid up on this site about every six weeks or so, on this occasion over two full days. The results continue to be absolutely frightening (see my previous Blog). **Once again over half of all heavy goods' vehicles stopped were committing serious offences** - I'll put some terrifying photos onto a future Blog entry so you can see for yourselves what we are dealing with. We clearly have a serious problem in the UK, and it needs fixing. You rarely see a seriously defective private car nowadays. Commonplace twenty years ago, but the regime is now so tight that unroadworthy cars are quickly identified and removed from circulation; you will still see the odd defective light, but that's about it. But with goods' vehicles we obviously do not have a system that works yet. The cowboy operators, who simply ignore the law (and thereby risk your life) are able to flourish, cutting corners and thereby competing unfairly with the legitimate law abiding firms. This is a national (and international) disgrace. More needs to be done, and I'll return to the subject another day. All the VOSA staff and North Wales Police officers on site were visibly enthused and committed to the task (a real credit to both organisations) but the task in hand is a daunting one. I think the Minister had quite an eye-opening experience; **very few people yet realise quite how bad the situation is.**

The second thing we did arose from my experience a couple of months ago on the north coast cycleway, which some long time readers will recall I recounted in one of my earliest Blogs. Briefly the UK is creating a national cycle network. Route 5 goes along the north Wales coast, ending at Holyhead. The network is being promoted for the UK government by the national charity Sustrans, which in Wales is also supported by the Welsh Assembly. The section between Conwy and Llanfaifechan is incomplete, because of the difficulty and expense of getting a dedicated cycle track around two headlands, Pen y Clip and Penmaenbach (the Romans didn't even attempt them, and went over the hills behind instead). These two gaps are regarded by Sustrans (<http://www.sustrans.org.uk/>) as the two worst locations in Wales. The current situation is extremely dangerous, and is a disaster waiting to happen.

To her enormous credit, the Minister accepted my challenge to cycle along this section with me, to check out the situation for herself. We completed the ride in good order, aided by a stiff tailwind and glorious sun (which always shines on the righteous, as you know).

It wasn't quite as terrifying as the previous occasion, because **the Assembly had cunningly closed the eastbound carriageway of the A55 around Pen y Clip** for repairs, so we were spared the exciting experience of sharing the live running lane with London-bound heavy goods' vehicles, hurtling past a mere metre or so from one's shoulder, but I think the point was made. **The local senior road engineer, himself a cyclist**, accompanied us for part of the trip, to his credit as well in my opinion.

I await further developments with interest. I'll keep you posted.

The PPP comments Brunstrom's misguided influence has encouraged huge but technically flawed investment in the cycle track alongside the A55 at Penmaenmawr. In so doing it has permanently degraded the safety of this major international trunk route. Over two years later the current incredibly slow & costly process of working on this is closing lanes on the A55 in both directions.

He has been ranting on about the foreign HGVs again in the local and national papers and there seems to have been no improvement or real strategy to achieve one. If these vehicles are so dangerous why are they allowed to travel for 100s of miles on UK M.Ways to be stopped near Holyhead ?.

Stenna, Irish Ferries and honest hauliers are suffering from the delays and congestion caused by VOSA. See their submission to parliament protesting about VOSA's activities <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmtran/907/6021527.htm>

This submission explains Brunstrom's relative conciliatory attitude to the problem recently. These are two examples of his dabbling in issues that are not his responsibility. He has the experience and brain power to come up with better advice and conclusions BUT the cult of the personality, the soundbite and the irrational urge to be controversial RULE.

The foreign hauliers should be dealt with (vehicles confiscated or banned from the UK?) not the drivers who are often abused by their employers. We are amazed how few cyclists seem to use this excellent scenic facility. Is there any record of the usage to justify the investment ?