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Roads Policing and Technology: Getting the Right Balance

As part of the above inquiry the Committee asked the Department to provide details of the evaluation of different techniques for cutting speed-related road deaths and injuries, including details of cost-benefit analysis to identify which techniques provide the greatest value for money in reducing road deaths and injuries.

As explained in our memorandum to the Committee, whilst a number of separate evaluations of speed management measures have been undertaken these do not provide all of the necessary information to enable comparisons to be made. Neither is it possible to obtain information for individual camera sites from the four year evaluation of the national safety camera programme. The information provided to the Committee was therefore extracted from the Department's *A Road Safety Good Practice Guide*, which was compiled by TRL and contains information provided by highway authorities about the effectiveness of a number of road safety measures in reducing vehicle speeds and accidents. As I am sure that you appreciate, this information was used in good faith.

However, it has recently been brought to our attention, through further information only now provided by the relevant highway authorities that some elements of the implementation costs of the speed camera and Vehicle Activated Signs (VAS) schemes set out in our memorandum may be incomplete. As such this also changes the estimates of value for money of these measures.

Firstly, further information from Norfolk County Council shows that the quoted £14,000 cost of the VAS, whilst for a single scheme, was for a pair of signs, and excluded provision of an electrical supply (which can be relatively significant in rural locations).

Secondly, further information from Oxfordshire County Council shows that the quoted £7,500 cost for the camera was the installation cost of the camera site and housing, but excluded the cost of the camera itself, which would have been separately paid for by the police. Whilst it is now normal practice for a single camera to be moved around camera housings, on the assumption that a camera was purchased for the site in question, the overall implementation cost of the camera site is around £40,000.

On the basis of this additional information, the estimated First Year Rate of Return for the camera and VAS, using the standard formula set out in the Good Practice Guide and adopted in our original memorandum, is estimated to be around 2.3 :1 and 21.3 :1 respectively.

I apologise for inadvertently providing incomplete information to the Committee. However, I can assure you that we acted in good faith, using information that had originally been provided by the highway authorities to TRL for use in the Good Practice Guide. We could not reasonably have known that the figures originally provided were not the full costs without the benefit of this additional information, which has only now come to light.

I should however also like to add that this new information does not change in any way the Department's support for these two important speed management measures. Both still provide excellent rates of return, and implementation cost of individual measures will vary according to the nature of the site. As our supplementary memorandum explained, it is difficult for various reasons to undertake a direct comparison of the effectiveness of speed reduction measures. The two mentioned here are of course used in different circumstances with cameras used to tackle excessive speeds and VAS inappropriate speed, which is usually within the speed limit but too fast for the conditions. Therefore, whilst the cost benefits of the two measures may have changed, it is not realistic, as some may presume, to deploy VAS as an alternative to camera enforcement.

It is the Department's role to promote and encourage use of the different speed management measures that are available through Traffic Advisory Leaflets and DfT Circulars. Safety cameras and VAS are of course just two of the approaches available to highway authorities and they remain best placed to decide where and when the respective measures provide the appropriate solution to the locally identified road safety problem.

With your permission, I am happy to publish this letter to set the record straight and bring this matter to a conclusion.

STEPHEN LADYMAN