Questions relating to the following text are in the Task Booklet
Managing speed on UK Roads

Introduction

The controlling of speed is central to road safety, as speed is the biggest single factor in road accidents in Britain. Road Traffic Authorities in some European countries have asserted that speeding is a factor in about 40% of all road fatalities. While policy makers, legislators, and interest groups have all worked to make transportation in Europe safer, serious issues remain for the EU and its member-states as it tries to reduce the number of accidents that occur on EU roads each year. Controlling speeds at appropriate levels appears to be the most significant step local authorities everywhere can take to meet targets for reducing road traffic casualties. Looking after people’s safety is clearly the key issue pressurising speed reduction policies, but equally significant is the fact that the quality of life for millions in urban and rural communities can be improved. Speed management offers significant social, environmental and economic benefits.

Section 1: __________________________________________________

These benefits are especially relevant to poorer communities as the areas in which they live suffer most from the less obvious consequences of fast driving. Over the last 30 years these communities have not been able to enjoy the use of parks and open land because of the growth of traffic causing noise, air pollution and the risk of accidents. Even their access to local streets has been affected. Decreasing the speed of traffic in such communities whose local environments have been damaged by the increase in road traffic is especially important.

It appears that drivers’ behaviour is a major factor influencing decisions to stay indoors rather than go out to open spaces, and to some extent explains the empty parks often seen in towns. Lowering traffic speed therefore benefits people of all ages, especially children, many of whom are denied safe, open spaces in which to develop and grow.

Section 2: __________________________________________________

The difference between speeding and other traffic crimes, apparent from research, is that it does not seem to be the activity of a minority of bad drivers: speeding is very widespread. According to Silcock (2008), the majority of drivers in the UK regularly break speed limits at certain times or in certain places. Silcock’s research also draws the disturbing conclusion that many drivers do not even regard speeding as a criminal offence. In relative terms, the UK does not have as serious road accident figures as some other EU countries, nevertheless speeding appears to be endemic. Figures for cars travelling over the speed limit on motorways were between 50% and 60% for all years between 2000 and 2007, although the level varies considerably on other types of road (Dept of Transport, 2008). This may seem to suggest that UK citizens would not support the concept of speed management, yet surveys of public opinion reveal the opposite: speed management and road safety are regularly identified as issues of the highest priority in community consultations undertaken by local authorities and police forces.
Section 3: __________________________

UK initiatives to control speed have been inspired to some extent by other European programmes. For example, motorways in the Netherlands were among the first to be equipped with variable speed regulation systems. The Austrian city of Graz has applied lower speed limits to 75% of its streets since 1995 and has achieved steady growth in cycling due to improved safety (Mitch, 2008).

Results from studies from Austria and other places have led some UK local authorities to lower speed limits, particularly in population settlements such as villages which previously had what many considered as high speed limits. These new restrictions can be imposed in many ways, The “20’s Plenty” campaign in the UK allows signs to be erected advising a 20 mph limit, rather than fixing the limit as law, which requires a long and expensive consultation process. Speed cameras appeared in large numbers in the late 1990s, and have proved very successful, although their success is limited to the immediate area. Indeed, their overall effectiveness has been questioned, as can be seen from the case of Swindon Council in southern England. In 2008, the council in Swindon stopped using speed cameras, arguing that they are expensive and that other methods of reducing speed are cheaper and more effective. Other measures such as road narrowings, humps and speed cushions have been widely used throughout Europe to control speed in urban areas with positive results.

Section 4: Government and local authority response to speed

The power of local authorities to introduce speeding and other initiatives was increased by the Local Government and Rating Act of 1997. Following this, the Local Government Act 2000 required local authorities to draw up community strategies to promote the social, economic and environmental well-being of the areas they serve, and the Transport Act 2000 has given local authorities the power to designate any road a quiet lane or home zone, with speeds as low as 10 mph. All of these measures were further emphasised in the Road Safety Act of 2006. So local communities play an important role in determining the priorities for action, which explains the different traffic calming measures that can be seen all over Britain.

Section 5: __________________________

Lower speed limits are supported by the majority of people in communities where they have been introduced. However, it should be understood that the introduction of traffic calming measures is not without problems. According to a report by Webster and Mackie (2003), such systems have also proved to be cost ineffective. Most of the measures can be expensive, varying from £5,000 for a simple traffic island to between £1,000 and £7,000 for a road hump. On top of this cost, there will have to be changes to traffic signs and often the street lighting as well. The total bill can be very high with a typical scheme costing around £50,000. This might, however, be offset by the reduction in driving speeds which could bring a potentially substantial reduction in costs for police, ambulance, fire and hospital services. Nevertheless, evidence has so far shown us that until there is a more significant change in driving behaviour the use of engineering measures to control speed will only have modest effects.
Section 6: __________________________________________________

Clearly, popular opinion and local government incentives are not sufficient to bring about safer driving behaviour. What is critically important is education and training, based on co-operation between the authorities and the public. This has led some police forces to take on a wider educational role. In the UK, Thames Valley Police run a road safety awareness programme for drivers caught speeding, as part of its partnership with local authorities and magistrates' courts. Police in Salzburg, Austria have developed a programme to address speeding by commercial drivers working for a haulage business, contacting fleet operators whenever one of their vehicles is stopped for speeding or other road traffic offences. The company is encouraged to ensure that people using its vehicles do so safely. It is also asked to consider its own procedures (driver schedules, job requirements and incentives) in case they put pressure on staff to take chances on the road. This is another example of a method the UK authorities might use in future. Such schemes illustrate the necessity of a successful collaborative effort.

The last paragraph of the text has been removed.
It forms the last questions of the Reading Section in the Task Booklet

Adapted from: