

Mis-Leading News Media Reports About London's Most Dangerous Intersections

Every year the London Police Force releases data on intersections within the City of London that have experienced the most traffic accidents. This year's release was broadcast yesterday and today by most news outlets. It should be clear to anyone that suggesting that more accidents indicate more danger is incorrect if the results are not controlled for other factors such as traffic volume. Indeed these reports do not control for any factors and no explanation is provided to the public in these news releases. It appears from the comments provided by the public that they are mis-led by the meaning of the data.

I had previously complained to the local television station (A-Channel news) in the fall of 2009 when they released similar information about a public poll of the worst roads in London (I believe the vote indicated Western Road was the worst). The spin of the subsequent news story never got to the core issue - that of mis-reporting and failure to report relevant roadway problems. Instead A-Channel opted to demonstrate how the roadway problem that I revealed on Clarke Road north of Fanshawe was quickly repaired when the City became aware of it. The fact that the problem existed throughout the summer and fall of 2009 and that roadway inspectors are required to inspect roadways as frequently as once a week seemed to pass by without mention. In fact, evidence at that site revealed that the safety problem was present much longer than in 2009 and that the City had made previous interventions but failed to do so in 2009.

The reluctance to discuss roadway problems is ingrained in the way our society functions. Little is reported about the large influence that civil litigation has on this process. When municipalities have millions of dollars to lose by admitting that problems exist on their roadways why would they admit to that? Municipalities have a monopoly on the inspection and record-keeping of roadway problems. They also control the budgets of the police who also have a monopoly on assessing the causes of roadway accidents. Clearly an objective evaluation should raise concern that roadway problems would be under-reported by these official agencies.

The most benefit to our society would occur if roadway inspectors were made independent of the municipalities who have a vested interest in hiding roadway problems. While plaintiff lawyers might have a field day with the availability of this objective data this can be held under proper control by the courts by recognizing that roadway personnel cannot fix every problem that exists, and by the courts being selective in punishing only those instances where the failure to maintain proper standards of safety were beyond reason.

But the present system is failing. Roadway problems that should be identified and corrected are being swept under the carpet. The official news media do not help when

they provide such superficial and mis-leading data to the public while failing to raise the proper red flag.

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