

Consultant and film producer team up to 'push boundaries' of junction controls



Keith Firth: keen to work with local authorities

Consultant Colin Buchanan is working with a film producer to examine how traffic can be managed at junctions without using traffic signals or traditional priority signing.

Keith Firth, Buchanan's director of traffic management, has teamed up with Martin Cassini who made headlines a couple of years ago when he wrote a report arguing that urban traffic would flow more smoothly if many traffic signals were removed.

"The message from Cassini was that traffic engineers don't really know what they are doing," said Firth. "That in 50 years traffic engineers haven't made the problem go away, so

why on earth should we believe them. Surely the public can look after themselves and we can make streets more civilised."

Firth's professional pride was piqued and he wrote to Cassini, before being introduced to him by a colleague. "I spent the first couple of months trying to convince him that he didn't really know what was going on. Six months later we are still working together, because he has changed my mind and I have changed his mind to a certain extent."

Now the Firth and Cassini form an unlikely double act, knocking on local authority doors trying to encourage the introduction of trials to remove traffic regulations and monitor the results. "Most people think that experiments mean removing signals," said Firth. "It needn't be that: it could be the removal of the priority rules at a junction, taking away all the signs and lines."

So far they have been in discussion with around a dozen local authorities including Westminster City Council, where they hope to be involved in future

trials on Victoria Street, and North Somerset Council, where a junction recently hit the headlines when the signals failed and the residents reported that all the traffic queues had disappeared.

Firth is motivated by a desire to increase knowledge of the effects of such measures and where they can be introduced without impacting adversely on the network management duties of the Traffic Management Act. "We can generally predict [using models] what will happen if we replace signals with conventional controls, but there is nothing to show what happens if we don't put conventional controls in," he said. "My dream is to have evidence one way or the other, some form of assistance or tool for traffic managers to say 'this is what you can do, we can demonstrate to you where this can and can't work'."

"Manual for Streets states there is no statutory requirement for junction priority, there never has been. Traffic engineers just assume that there is a requirement". "What I am saying is, let's push the boundaries."

in brief

Heathrow expansion 'good for economy'

Expanding Heathrow Airport will deliver billions of pounds of benefit to the UK economy over the next 60 years according to a study commissioned by the British Chambers of Commerce. Consultant Colin Buchanan says the expansion could, over 60 years, generate £30bn of benefits such as increased productivity and higher levels of employment. The report has been criticised by HACAN, the campaign group opposing expansion. It says the report is "out of step" with the Government's own estimate that the economic benefits of expansion would be only £5bn over 70 years. *Economic impacts of hub airports* is available at www.transportxtra.com/ltt

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