

No traffic lights planned for accident blackspot in West Lothian

Villagers at a West Lothian accident blackspot have been told they will not get the traffic lights or flashing signs they wanted to warn speeding drivers of a dangerous humpback bridge.

Roads engineers confirmed that repairs to accident barriers after a series of recent crashes were under way but stressed that no amount of engineering could stop reckless or dangerous drivers speeding toward the humpback bridge and 90-degree bend at Harburn.

Villagers had also wanted the 30mph zone extended through the village, but roads engineers said this couldn't be done because it would be "impossible for police to enforce".

Roads Network Manager Gordon Brown told a meeting of the Fauldhouse and Breich Valley Local Area Committee that he could look add coloured road 30mph markings in addition to putting extra warning "countdown" signs on both sides of the bridge before the 30mph zone starts.

High visibility warning signs will also be considered alongside new protection barriers and enhanced chevrons signs to replace those taken out in the spate of collisions earlier this year. They are being installed this week.

Allan McLaughlan from the community council asked why a double strand barrier could not be put into place on the southern side of the bridge and also called for barriers on the northern side.

He told the meeting: "What we have is a very dangerous situation and we have been most fortunate there's been no fatalities. It is escalating."

Mr Brown replied: "When we are looking at accidents we have got to adhere to certain design standards."

He added that the barriers were adequate for a 30mph area on a rural road. It was designed to keep a car on the carriageway rather than prevent people from driving recklessly.

Mr Brown said: "Some of the incidents that are being reported to us by the public, there's no engineering solutions that we could put in to prevent these types of accidents happening.

"We have one report where a member of the public was evading the police, there was another, possibly a medical incident. These types of incident there's no engineering measures which would prevent these in the future. which is unfortunate but is a fact.

"The measures we're proposing will address issues of speeding or taking the bend too fast, providing people drive with due care and attention, and consideration for the environment. These measures we are proposing will help to reduce casualties."

Mr McLaughlan raised concerns that so few accidents had apparently been recorded by the council.

Mr Brown said engineers had to rely on specifically vetted data recorded at incidents by police officers. "We do not take into consideration near misses, close calls or members of the public reporting because we have to go on justified

measures.”

Villagers have had to tackle around a dozen accidents in Harburn this year as many drivers unfamiliar with the blind bend and narrow railway bridge came to grief in accidents, ploughing off the road.

The narrow winding B7008 road has become much busier in recent years. Some now believe that in car satnav systems direct drivers along the road as a shortcut to the A70 from Livingston because, for most of its length, it carries the 60-mph national speed limit.

While many drivers and passengers have been taken to hospitals there have been no fatalities.

Luck seems to play an improbable part. In the most recent accident, a Birmingham based van driver escaped unhurt after his Transit van sailed over the makeshift barrier on the north end of the bridge before dropping 20 feet into a boggy field. He was towed out by the farmer and able to continue his journey.

After this week's meeting Mr McLaughlan told the Local Democracy Reporting Service he was disappointed that the 30-mph zone couldn't be extended, and the community would have to wait and see whether the new measures would work. He requested a public meeting with roads officers and the villagers.

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter