

Why the Speed Bumps Rankle

by Trevor Dutton

The debate over the Hansville speed bumps has grown ugly and I am a party to the ugliness. From my neighborhood there is no way around them. I honk while traversing the 'speed tables' on Hood Canal Drive (read: 12 foot long speed bumps). I honk in protest knowing that it aggravates the surrounding neighborhood at all hours of the day. I continue to be loud despite the fact that it makes me feel awful every time I lay on the car horn. I'm knowingly degrading the quality of people's lives, many of whom had nothing to do with the installation of the bumps. I honk as a reminder to all that the bumps were a poor solution that has turned into a bigger problem. The speed bumps have merely displaced anger from one group of people to another. The process by which the speed bumps were put in was also wrong from both a legal and moral standpoint. I honk because of the unfairness of that process. I honk representing the people whose quality of life has been degraded by these 'virtuous' safety measures. I honk because the bumps are unacceptable and need to be removed.

The first I knew of these roadway obstacles was the first time I had to navigate them. At that time I was incensed and moderately annoyed. One's first assumption is that they were the result of established road engineering standards and a tested county governmental process for such matters. But knowing what I know now about the circumstances surrounding their emplacement, the overwhelming evidence is that this was not the case. As a result I'm now irate.

Where has all the information come from that this standpoint is based on? After learning about the opposition Beep4bumps.com website through some hastily posted roadside signs (and apparently just as hastily ripped down) and being VERY reluctant to get involved in what promised to be a lengthy dispute, a process of self education was reluctantly undertaken. Since then it's been a nonstop investigation into who the players are in this confrontation and what they have to say. I've since attended meetings of the Greater Hansville Area Advisory Council (GHAAC), their subcommittee the Road Safety Advisory Council (RSAC), and the annual meeting of the board of directors for my neighborhood. The president of which, I've come to find out, has been representing my voice as the spokesperson of my neighborhood in the GHAAC. If not for digging for the truth about this issue, I may never have known my interests were being undermined in this context. I've thoroughly digested each of the above group's websites and continue to do so. I've emailed or talked about this topic in person with my

aforementioned neighborhood president, the author of the Beep4bumps site, and the county commissioner of our district.

The argument FOR the speed bumps is as follows, as far as I've been able to discern: Property owners along Hood Canal Drive and Twin Spits have complained in recent years of drivers passing by their lots going recklessly fast and endangering pets and children. Apparently at least one dog has been killed by a car, and as a fellow pet owner I find this deeply saddening.

I say 'as far as I've been able to discern' about this viewpoint because the proponents for the bumps have been tight lipped and curt when queried about the bumps. They've been downright non-talkative in fact. The Hansville.org website temporarily had a single page mention of the issue, consisting of a written explanatory statement. The content of which echoes what has been said in person by everyone I've heard who's in favor of the bumps. "Take our word for it – they're necessary."

No support with solid figures? No incontrovertible speed study results? No surveys? No opinion polls? No traffic accident statistics? No documentation? No sources cited? No precedence quoted? No evidence at all that research of any kind was conducted before the decision was made? This leads one to believe that, at best, an amateurish attempt was made to research their implementation. At worst it suggests that the members of the GHAAC knew that they couldn't prove the bumps were advisable, and went ahead with them anyway. They thought it would alleviate their immediate headache and didn't question the expense to others. Then it was on to the fast track to completion before the majority of residents North of them were aware what was going on. In fact they must have known there would be opposition. After all, nobody likes speed bumps. But apparently the members of the GHAAC were willing to gamble that whatever opposition arose wouldn't be significant enough to matter. About that they misjudged again.

The Beep4bumps.com website embodies the effort to have the new asphalt work reversed. It's been a rallying focus and has snowballed in size over the last six months. In stark contrast to what the proponents have to present as justification, this site has amassed a mountain of supportive information. Surveys, documents of all kinds, emails, articles, web links, maps, images . . . far too much to begin describing here. It's all quite convincing. And it's all verifiable. The tone of the site is communicative, transparent and open. Articulately collected, it presents what a judge might call 'an open and shut case'.

One document in particular has stood out as poignant – a 2005 Kitsap County Department of Public Works analysis of Hood Canal Drive by then director R. W. Casteel (see first link under ‘public records’ tab at beep4bumps.com). It’s a pre-bump analytical summary of the issue by an unbiased third party. Not only does it say that speed bumps on this thoroughfare would be inappropriate and could cause more harm than benefit. It also uncovers something that I’ve suspected as a driver of this particular stretch of road for seven years – the speed limit is posted unnaturally low. Speed limits are based on established methods of finding the ‘average’ safe speed that motorists are traveling according to velocity measuring sensors temporarily placed across the road. Once a reasonable velocity is determined for a roadway it’s written as law and posted accordingly. In short, drivers themselves determine what the safe speed is on any given road by how fast the majority of vehicles are traveling it. It’s based on the common assumption that most people aren’t reckless speeders. Judging by multiple reassessment studies conducted on Hood Canal Drive within the last three years, the speed limit should currently be posted at 40mph. In an email from Steve Johnson to Sgt. Mike Merrill, a study on 5/18/04 revealed the appropriate speed limit to be 45mph. However, unscrupulous unseen forces have insured that the limit on this stretch was at one time suppressed to 25mph slower, and is currently 10-15mph slower than it should be by county standards. That’s well below a reasonable safe speed. The same Public Works document then goes on to say “Posting the speed limit too low may have an adverse effect on traffic safety . . . resulting in dangerous passing, rear end accidents, and driver frustration.” I’ve personally been behind someone going over the hurdles at 10mph. It then says “Unreasonably lowering the speed limit can also lead to contempt for those who establish and enforce traffic laws.” Need I now describe how I felt when I was running late one day and received a speeding ticket on this exact stretch of road for going 45 miles an hour? Not by coincidence the ticket was written by the overtime Sheriff’s Deputy who was hired privately by residents along this same stretch of road to enforce their customized speed trap. Could there be a more cut and dry case for entrapment? Need I explain further WHY I’m enraged?

I’ve been meaning to vent festering thoughts in written form about this transportation issue for the last five months in order to fully voice my grievance to those individuals who thought it was a good idea to force their vested interests upon the rest of us. This seems necessary seeing as how no official input was afforded northern neighborhoods before these decisions were made. Though the GHAAC who pushed the bumps through would

have us believe that a postcard mailer announcing one of their meetings is the same thing as asking directly whether or not residents would mind having to deal with large mounds of asphalt on the road during their commute. To be accused of being 'uninvolved' for not attending local meetings on a regular basis, is condescending and hence infuriating. For a group to abuse responsibility and then blame those who bear the abuse's brunt for not voicing resistance before hand, is opportunism plain and simple. Are we Hans-villains in a race to grab power? Are the bumps a nonverbal suggestion that we're now adversaries? For anyone to put forward an informed disagreement now on the installation of these 'traffic calming devices' would be water under the bridge. So there's little left to do at this late stage short of insisting on their un-installation. Hence over six hundred signatures on the petition submitted to the Kitsap County Commission several weeks ago.

As far as speed bumps go these are admittedly gentle blockages (varying widely upon the vehicle you're driving and whether you're moving at the speed that Cliffside residents prefer you to go, or the REAL speed limit). However they are still an irritating obstacle. All four of them. Coming and going . . . eight times a day. Every day. Multiply that by 365 cumulative days a year and you have a hell of a lot of irritating encumbrances. Multiply that by however many years you're forced to live with them and you have an unacceptable situation.

Regarding the argument whether the length of time the speed tables slow down emergency response vehicles is acceptable or not ANY amount of delay in responding is too much! Can a mere 32 seconds extra on an ambulance trip (4 seconds per bump according to Kitsap Fire and Rescue multiplied by 4 bumps, both coming and going) mean the difference between life or death? Are bump proponents willing to find out? Apparently so most unfortunately. Are they willing to be liable if someone else finds out? According to Kathleen Calongne in her 1999 article Problems Associated with Traffic Calming Devices "Seattle with an average emergency response time of less than 7 minutes saves 30% of its Sudden Cardiac Arrest victims. New York, with an average response time of 12 minutes saves only 2%." Once again these bumps are for . . . SAFETY? Let's take a moment to remember that wars have been waged in the name of virtue. Whose safety is being prioritized in this case and is it being done so irrationally?

Which brings us to an unpleasant point that needs to be discussed before the discussion goes further. This conflict has gotten steadily more heated since it began. However there are many ways that we, as those who chose to become involved on both sides, can make each other's lives still more interrupted over this issue before it's resolved. It has the potential to bring out the worst in us all, the deepest pettiness. In a genuine effort to thwart that from happening it should be stated at this juncture that I personally feel strongly enough to pursue the matter all the way through a legal confrontation. I'm prepared to take a lawsuit to the courts and I'm not alone with this resolution. Should that happen, there could be much more than the speed bumps and speed limit at stake. It's stated not as a threat but as a hopeful deterrent. Nothing in this letter is intended to be inflammatory nor is it meant to lash out emotionally. If it comes across as such then I apologize for miscommunication. I do admit to being angry over the subject on any number of occasions. On a (bump) daily (bump) basis (bump) in fact (bump) to borrow a phrase. But this description of solemn intent is better to be laid on the table now, as opposed to being unmasked at the end of a long hard road in the future. I have enough experience with the courts not to take them at all lightly. The principle of fairness has been violated here. The longer it takes to have these 'devices' removed, the more serious this grievance will escalate. By truthfully presenting how far I'm willing to go, I'm hoping to avert that actuality from happening.

After seeing them in action I believe the GHAAC is a well meaning and good hearted group of people overall. The bulk of the items on their agenda truly improve our regional atmosphere in a cooperative manner. Gardening, local culture, environmental concerns, and recreation are some examples. As a collective they're not a power hungry bunch and for that I commend them. With control of speeding however they muscled into a political arena, making other people's decisions for them. But inventing and enforcing traffic policy has as a result shown to be outside their authority. Unfortunately on this one issue the organization's credibility was gambled and damaged. It would seem that the influence of a few individuals convinced the GHAAC as well as our three county commissioners that our roads were not already in competent hands.

So our attention now focuses on those select few individuals. It's relevant to repeat here that almost all of the members of the RSAC – the subcommittee formed by the GHAAC for the purpose of alleviating the speeding issue – own houses on or near the present location of the bumps. Hence the directional rudeness of my car horn (it may be rage, but not blind rage). It's also worth mentioning here that several years ago when Hood Canal Drive was being resurfaced Kitsap County surveyed all of the households who use this road. I distinctly remember filling out a public survey received in the mail as to which of three options for the then upcoming roadwork I preferred. User input! Revelatory! The first option was for having a minimal shoulder. The second was a wider paved shoulder. The third contained a plan for a parallel bike/pedestrian path to be built alongside the street. Hindsight being 20/20, option number three might have been the ideal selection and saved us all from recent shouting matches. But credible witnesses say that a designated bike/pedestrian path was vetoed by Hood Canal Drive residents since it would have required the sacrifice of an 8 foot wide swathe of property bordering the road in order to construct the trail. Instead cash ended up being taken from the county fund set aside for cyclist and pedestrian purposes in order to build \$50,000.00 worth of nuisance directly on top of our thoroughfare. Wait a second – doesn't the law state that adjacent residents pay for speed bumps themselves? This is of course assuming their street isn't classified as a busy 'collector' road the way Hood Canal Drive has been. Wait another second – wasn't the original complaint about speeding not for the safety of walkers and bikers, but children and pets? Wouldn't a simple yard boundary like a tastefully low fence or hedgerow be much more effective if that were truly the case? What of 'good fences make good neighbors'? Or was that option struck down by homeowners as not being worth the financial sacrifice? After all, that would have to come out of their personal pockets instead of county coffers. In other words the cost came out of all of our pockets. I guess it was calculated it's cheaper to complain to the Sheriff's department than to take responsible initiative. But why would anyone buy a lot near an airport and then complain about the noise?

Perhaps an alternate motivation for suppressing vehicle flow is that people want to have their after dinner strolls and Sunday family bike outings on the calm and serene avenues that they remember from yesteryear. I know I do. Many around here are long time inhabitants and purchased homes back when the peninsula had a slower pace. But like it or not, if the tiny town of Hansville isn't already considered a suburb of the metropolis of Seattle, then it soon will be. New housing developments here are well under way.

Growing volumes of drivers are a change that we need to accept. If we resist progress then drivers will apply counter pressure. In this case 600 plus people have done just that when they put pen to paper on the recent bump removal petition.

Steve Bauer our county commissioner has called for alternate solutions to the original problem if in fact the speed bumps were to be removed. In light of all the options that have previously been decided against or passed over, I'm not inclined to strain further in this direction. Residents adapting or relocating are also available options that nobody's given mention. Come live on my cul-de-sac. There's currently a house for sale!

Who will pay for the removal is of immediate concern. Is it at all 'just' to require taxpayers to pony up for correcting the mistake? Would those who made the ill informed judgment be willing to be personally accountable for it? Shall we schedule a peninsula wide block party where we all show up with pickaxes and wheelbarrows and take them out together over a beer and a crab leg?

As mentioned before, those of us who only experience this short causeway while in transit remain unconvinced that there genuinely is a REAL speeding problem here. Of course there are going to be speeders. Every road carries unwise users. Is that percentage on our particular avenue significant enough to enable clamping down on approximately 1400 vehicles per day with excessive regulation, extra enforcement, and physical protuberances? "Trust us – it's necessary". If it is then PLEASE convince me. Prove that the disturbances I'm being subjected to are for a greater good. By that I mean quantitatively helping others as opposed to merely affording them piece of mind and a false sense of security. After all, the price of unnecessary speed bumps can be measured in wear and tear on vehicles, emergency response times, and perhaps most ironic – detriment to driver and pedestrian safety as reported in abundance online!

To Kitsap commissioners: you seem to have the final word in matters of this nature. I'm sure you thought you were helping when you signed to have them put in. Approximately 600 of your constituents are expectantly watching to determine how well you react to this situation. Re-question the root of the problem, the source of the original complaint. Are a handful of vocal individuals being irrationally afraid, stuck in the past, or self serving in this matter? Did they already have alternate opportunities to abate their concerns before resorting to what ended up happening? Is there favoritism afoot? Will our much loved community be returned to it's prior dignified condition?

