



Mr Sean McGovern
HM Coroner for Coventry and Warwickshire
The Coroner's Office
Little park Street
Coventry
CV1 2JX

[REDACTED]
13 May 2015

Dear Mr McGovern

Re: The late Valerie Walton

I refer to your letter of 23rd March, sent to me under Regulation 28 of the Coroners Rules Act of the Coroners (Investigations) Regulations 2013 to prevent future deaths.

I would like, at the start of this letter, to offer the Council's sincere condolences to the family of Valerie Walton on their sad loss.

Appended to your letter was your report and in particular your statement of concerns following the inquest, which were:-

'I heard evidence from [REDACTED] of the Regional Collision Investigation Unit that the positioning of the crossing on the apex of a sharp bend was contributory to this death. He opined that had the crossing been on the straight section of the road the death may not have occurred or alternately whether the crossing should be controlled by traffic lights.'

In response, please be assured that Coventry City Council takes its responsibility to promote the safety of all road users in the city very seriously. As such, the zebra crossing in question was introduced at this location following a local petition about concerns over road safety, in particular relating to pedestrians crossing the road in the vicinity of the crossing to use the various local facilities.

In terms of the process we follow, all traffic and road safety schemes implemented by the Council are subject to a road safety audit by a team of engineers who are independent of the design team. The Road Safety Audit procedure has been developed "to ensure that operational road safety experience is applied during the design and construction process in order that the number and severity of collisions is kept to a minimum" (Department for Transport Design Manual for Roads and Bridges HD 19/15).

Chief Executive's Office

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As a result, as part of the process of installing the Zebra Crossing in 2006, three stages of safety audit were undertaken:-

- Combined Stage 1 & 2 – Completion of Design
- Stage 3 – Completion of Construction
- Stage 4 – Monitoring of recorded injury accidents after completion

At both the combined Stage 1 & 2 and Stage 3 the auditors were happy with the visibility of the zebra crossing, other than with an issue observed after completion when buses were seen parking slightly on the crossing which was subsequently resolved. The stage 4 part of the process is reviewing the accidents at 1 and 3 years after implementation to see what problems develop from the change in the road. The Police recorded injury accident database is used for this. In the eight years from the installation of the zebra crossing until the unfortunate accident there are none recorded which involved injury to a pedestrian crossing on the zebra. The only other accident was a car on car, tail shunt, indicating that a driver had stopped for a pedestrian.

It is impossible to make a highway where vehicles and pedestrians mix completely safe; we can only make it safer. In view of your recent comments we have reviewed again the site to consider what measures might be implemented to improve the safety. Four options have been considered:-

1. Upgrade the facility to a signalised Puffin Crossing.

Whilst this would increase the conspicuity of the crossing and encourage drivers to stop, observations of the use of the existing Zebra crossing by pedestrians suggests that this may be less safe. This is because we would anticipate that most pedestrians would not push the button and wait, as there are plenty of gaps in the traffic, and visibility is good enough to tempt people to cross. Even if they did push the button they may not wait the 10 to 45 seconds for a green man given the low flows and cross when traffic had a green light and drivers did not anticipate stopping.

Therefore the Council at this moment in time does not proposed to upgrade the Zebra to a Puffin Crossing as it does not consider that it is likely to improve the safety of the crossing facility and may actually have a detrimental effect.

2. Relocate the crossing.

The problem with relocating the crossing is that, looking at each option in turn, if we move it to the:-

- Middle of the straight from Robin Hoods Road to the bend. To do this we would have to remove most of the on street parking. 'Due to the current level of demand for on-street parking in the local vicinity it is considered that under this option it would increase the likelihood that drivers would park illegally, including on the zig zag markings, thus restricting visibility between drivers and pedestrians using the crossing.

- East side of the existing crossing. To do this we lose the bus stops which are well used and an important timing point for services. These would have to be relocated into the on street car parking bays which in our opinion, would produce problems of cars persistently parking in the bus stops or we would have to relocate the stops away from the shops.

The other consideration is pedestrian 'desire' lines. These are the natural routes taken by pedestrians to get to their chosen destination usually based on the quickest or most convenient route to walk along. Site observations would suggest that pedestrians see the existing crossing to be on their desire line to the entrance of the Co Op food centre. So relocating significantly away from this desire line may reduce the use of the crossing facility and encourage more pedestrians to cross the road without 'protection' of the Zebra.

Consequently, the Council at this moment in time does not propose to relocate the crossing as it does not consider that it is likely to improve the safety of the crossing facility and the area around it.

3. Remove the Zebra Crossing

There is a strand of professional opinion that in some situations where low traffic and/or pedestrian flows occur that removing a Zebra or Puffin crossing facility can improve road safety at a location. However site observations show the crossing to be well used and therefore this has been dismissed as an option.

4. Enhance the existing zebra crossing conspicuity

Subsequent site observation identified that based on the nature of the accident various measures could be undertaken to enhance the conspicuity of the crossing for drivers:-

- a) Reduce the under-hanging branches from the trees to the south of the crossing which can in full leaf partially conceal the southern Belisha beacon and approaching pedestrians.
- b) Re-align the crossing by moving it more onto the centre of the bend, to enhance the visibility of the surface of the crossing as well as pedestrians already on the crossing for drivers approaching from the south.
- c) Remove the guard rail from the inside of the bend to reduce any masking effect it might create for drivers of pedestrians.
- d) Reduce the height and number of bollards on the right hand side of Remembrance Road as drivers approach from Robin Hood Road to reduce any masking effect it might create for drivers of pedestrians.
- e) Make use of more intensely illuminated Belisha beacon heads. The conversion from conventional heads to the Zeebrite type head. This will also require the installation of an additional two poles and heads as the Zeebrite type heads are highly directional so that each set of two is aligned along the approach direction.

- f) Include on all poles with Belisha beacons on, illuminated poles whereby the white parts of the pole is illuminated.

Having considered the options it is proposed that option 4, to enhance the conspicuity of the Zebra crossing is implemented. It is anticipated that these works will be undertaken over the next three to six months.

Please note that the City Council has not received a copy of the detailed Police investigation of the accident that was provided to you. Therefore our engineers' assessment of how the crossing might be improved to prevent a similar accident is based on a number of elements: information gleaned from a site meeting with the Police on the day of the accident; your comments in your Regulation 28 notice; site observations; and their professional opinion based on the information available to them.

I trust that as a result of our proposed actions the safety of potentially vulnerable road users such as pedestrians can be enhanced with a view to preventing a further death and that this letter provides sufficient response to your questions and assurance.

Yours sincerely

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of Martin Reeves.

Martin Reeves
Chief Executive