

# Deaths rise in the snap-happy county

ROAD deaths have soared in Essex – where motorists are most likely to be caught over the speed limit.

The county, which boasts 90 fixed speed cameras, has topped a Government 'league table' for the highest number of speeding prosecutions.

One in six drivers there has been fined for speeding.

Yet 116 people died on its roads last year – a rise of 25 per cent since it joined the cash-for-cameras scheme.

The table shows 213,861 drivers were prosecuted for exceeding the limit in Essex during 2002 – 44 times more than in Gloucestershire, where

By **Transport Editor**

just 4,799 were prosecuted. Yet at the same time, the Essex Partnership's figures show fatalities rose from 87 in 2000 to 116 last year.

Essex hosted one of the original eight flagship pilot schemes for the 'cash-for-cameras' initiative now in force across most of Britain.

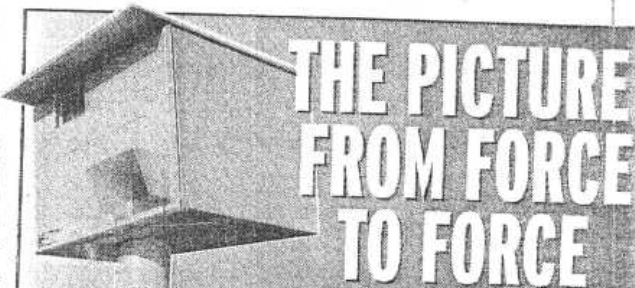
Last night, critics suspected Essex's embarrassing road safety figures may have prompted the Government's decision to delay its report into the effectiveness of the pilot schemes until after local elections on June 10. Thames

Valley, third in the table, was also one of the first eight pilot schemes.

Lancashire, in second place, is one of 12 areas where drivers can take an £85 'speed awareness' course instead of being fined.

Drivers in Gloucestershire are the least likely to be caught speeding, along with those in Gwent, the City of London, North Yorkshire, Merseyside, Cumbria, Surrey, and Durham. Each area prosecuted fewer than 10,000 motorists.

Essex has admitted a pool of 100 police officers on extra speed camera duties claimed £510,000 in overtime last year.



# Penalty points shake-up as fury grows over speed cameras

MOTORISTS only marginally over the speed limit will receive just two penalty points on their licences in a massive revamp of the 'totting-up' procedure.

Under the current system, three points are given, regardless of the severity of the offence.

At 12 points drivers automatically lose their licences, meaning they can be banned from the road with just four minor offences in three years.

In future, they would probably have to commit six minor or two major offences before losing their licences.

Under the plan, those who seriously exceed the speed limit would face up to six penalty points.

The Government's climbdown on the penalty points system follows public outrage at the soaring number of speed camera prosecutions.

With 30,500 motorists banned in 2002, there are fears that those who need their licences for work are losing their livelihoods for relatively minor infringements.

More than three million prosecutions are expected this year.

Motorists believe the system, policed by 4,000 speed cameras, is more concerned with raising

By **Ray Massey**  
Transport Editor

cash than improving road safety. Transport Secretary Alistair Darling insisted the new totting-up system aimed 'to make the punishment fit the crime'.

But the timing of the announcement – weeks before key local government and European elections – has aroused suspicions of Downing Street spin to defuse widespread anger over speed cameras.

There is also deep suspicion about the Government's decision to delay a report, due this week, into the performance of the eight original speed camera

## 'Punishment fits the crime'

pilot schemes. This has been put off until after the June 10 elections.

Speed camera convictions soared by 40 per cent in 2002. Government figures showed earlier this month.

More than 1.4 million motorists were fined £60 and given three penalty points on their licences – a fivefold rise since the first cameras were installed in 1996.

Details of the new system are yet to be finalised. Transport

officials are expected to consider a 'range' of flexible penalties – from zero to six points.

Mr Darling said: 'We must reduce speeding but the public must have confidence that the punishment fits the crime.'

Tory transport spokesman Damian Green said the Government had stolen the Tories' policy of revamping the inflexible totting-up system.

He called for it to adopt another by scrapping the 'partnerships' between police, local authorities and road safety groups, which run speed camera enforcement.

Under these 'cash-for-cameras' schemes, police forces are allowed to keep around a third of the fines.

Critics say this encourages forces to use the cameras for fundraising rather than saving lives.

RAC Foundation executive director Edmund King yesterday welcomed the revamp, with reservations.

'It doesn't go far enough,' he said. 'There's no doubt that this is in response to the backlash from motorists and rank-and-file policemen.'

Last week, the Police Federation said speed cameras were destroying the relationship between police and law-abiding citizens.

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Police force	Penalty tickets	Court cases	Total fines	Deaths/serious injuries
Essex	199,201	14,660	213,861	1,302
Lancashire	158,163	3,895	162,058	1,077
Thames Valley	121,677	11,086	132,763	1,536
Derbyshire	71,965	3,754	75,719	734
South Wales	61,948	2,015	63,963	449
Metropolitan Police	53,334	7,635	60,969	5,620
Northamptonshire	60,459	230	60,689	540
Avon & Somerset	53,846	5,060	58,906	903
North Wales	44,459	3,861	48,320	382
Northumbria	41,050	2,669	43,719	647
Greater Manchester	35,861	7,321	43,182	1,061
Bedfordshire	40,338	1,590	41,928	289
Kent	36,645	1,703	38,348	1,073
Nottinghamshire	35,771	2,065	37,836	913
Hampshire	31,867	5,043	36,910	1,308
Devon & Cornwall	31,144	3,493	34,637	901
West Yorkshire	32,126	2,366	34,492	1,319
West Mercia	29,098	2,260	31,358	933
Lincolnshire	27,490	3,729	31,219	736
Wiltshire	27,975	2,696	30,671	430
Staffordshire	29,094	1,105	30,199	476
Cleveland	25,264	1,164	26,428	253
Hertfordshire	23,203	2,359	25,562	814
Sussex	23,550	1,784	25,334	1,082
West Midlands	17,762	4,794	22,556	1,304
Dorset	18,686	1,043	19,729	543
Leicestershire	17,903	1,789	19,692	478
Norfolk	17,116	1,315	18,431	813
South Yorkshire	16,096	1,868	17,964	740
Cheshire	13,578	4,016	17,594	778
Warwickshire	14,999	1,758	16,757	572
Cambridgeshire	15,435	533	15,968	650
Humberside	13,399	1,149	14,548	738
Dyfed Powys	12,343	523	12,866	537
Suffolk	9,477	1,284	10,761	403
Durham	7,697	1,841	9,538	295
Surrey	6,052	2,021	8,073	695
Cumbria	5,797	1,622	7,419	482
Merseyside	6,484	654	7,138	781
North Yorkshire	5,412	1,253	6,665	959
City of London	4,782	567	5,349	51
Gwent	2,960	2,245	5,205	284
Gloucestershire	3,898	901	4,799	336

Total (England & Wales) 1,505,404 | 124,619 | 1,630,023 | 36,044

Sources: Home Office, Department of Transport, 2002 figures.