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Bumps in the Road

Hartford attempts to fight traffic slumps with road humps

By Adam Bulger



It's been said before, but it's worth repeating: driving in Hartford is crazy. It's the only city I've been where drivers seem to believe there's an unspoken left on red rule. In the west end of Hartford, at least, it has of late become harder to treat the city like the Autobahn.

In the past two months, the city placed eight temporary speed humps, each costing about \$8,000 on Girard and Kenyon Avenues, residential streets often dense with traffic.

"There are streets that are designated for cross town traffic. The main ones in the West End are Woodland Street, Whitney Street and Prospect Avenue," West End resident John McGarvey said. "Because there are lights on those streets, people were using the other streets, which are the residential streets — Kenyon, Oxford and others — as thoroughfares."

The humps, which are plastic speed bumps approximately two inches high, have already made an impact on traffic patterns in the neighborhood, residents report.

"I can tell you from living on the street there's been a dramatic reduction in terms of cars, and speed as well," Kenyon Street resident Martha Shaw said.

Shaw, the secretary for the West End Civic Association, spearheaded the latest traffic calming measures. When Shaw moved into her home, she was annoyed by the number of speeding cars on the street and took action.

Shaw started making monthly calls to Traffic Engineering Division Manager Kevin Burnham's office. Her efforts paralleled long-standing goals by neighborhood groups.

Hartford Mayor Eddie Perez and Burnham attended a WECA meeting, where residents demanded traffic calming measures.

"The West End speed tables went in this summer and they're going to be taken out approximately in November. It's the type of material that's meant to be temporary because of the weather," Hartford spokesperson Sarah Barr said. The city is studying how effective the humps are at calming traffic. Depending on the results of the study, they may be placed on streets again next year.

The speed humps, of course, only cover a handful of the city's 714 city blocks. In 2005, a city-commissioned report was released, which outlined a traffic calming plan for the city. The 259-page report enumerated in great detail a plan for taming Hartford's anarchic traffic patterns in each of the city's neighborhoods. Many of the study's recommendations were implemented, but it's unlikely many drivers noticed.

"A lot of the improvements were almost invisible," said traffic planning expert Dan Burden, director of Walkable Communities and a contributor to the report. He explained that the most effective way to calm traffic is to redirect it in ways that curb what he termed "unfriendly" driving. Simply removing lanes from a road, he said, can change the way traffic operates for the better.

Burden was surprised to hear that Hartford had increased its number of speed humps.

"Those are about the least attractive option for calming traffic," he said.

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