Night-Time Accident Reductions Dimmed By Council Street Light Switch-Offs

Thursday 10 April, 2014

Night-time accidents in bad weather on 30 mph urban roads have been slashed by 15.6% over the past five years. But, where street lights have been switched off or are not present, the fall is just 2.0%, AA research reveals.

?
Official statistics show that, on darkened 40 mph built-up roads, accidents in the wet, snow or ice are down 21.8% where there is lighting, but only 5.2% where there is not.

Overall, from 2007 to 2012, a 19.6% reduction in road accidents along town and city roads where street lights were on shrank to 8.8% where drivers, cyclists, bikers and pedestrians travelled in darkness.
12% of AA members set off for or returned from work in the small hours of winter
Only 47% are happy with a midnight to 5am blackout
78% want to be consulted, 70% want a vote before a blackout is imposed
Latest black outs
This spring, Essex is the latest county council to black out roads for at least part of the night, switching off 77% of its street lights. Lancashire is considering a similar move.

Out at night
An AA-Populus survey of 24,351 AA members (21 February - 3 March) found that, over a month, 12% have set off for or returned from work between midnight and 5am on at least one occasion. That rises to 24% among 18 to 24-year-olds and 21% among skilled service and manual workers.
Of the whole sample, 34% have travelled during the small hours because of a social event and 5% because of travel disruption.

Members' views
We asked the AA-Populus motoring panel what they think of switching off up to 70% of street lights between 12 midnight and 5am:

1. I think this sounds like a good initiative to help cut costs and reduce CO2 emissions:
54% agree (18% strongly, 37% somewhat
Most agree - South West 63%, least agree - London 43%
2. I would be happy for street lights to be turned off between midnight and 5am in my local area:
47% agree (18% strongly, 29% somewhat
Most agree - South West 57% , least agree - London 30%
3. Turning off street lights after midnight will encourage vandalism and bad behaviour:
58% agree (21% strongly, 37% somewhat
Most agree - London 70%, least agree - South West 50%
4. Turning off street lights after midnight will encourage more serious crime, such as burglary:
59% agree (22% strongly, 37% somewhat
Most agree - London 72%, least agree - South West 50%
5. Local residents should be consulted before lights are switched off between 12 midnight and 5am in their area:
78% agree (41% strongly, 37% somewhat
Most agree - London 84%, least agree - South West 74%
6. Local residents should be given the chance to vote on whether street lights should be switched off in their area:
70% agree (34% strongly, 35% somewhat
Most agree - London 76%, least agree - South West 65%
7. Consulting with the local police on crime and road accident statistics is sufficient for highway authorities to decide whether or not to turn off street lights:
50% agree (15% strongly, 35% somewhat
Most agree - South West 53%, least agree - London 44%
8. Turning off street lights without my consent isn't fair because I pay for them through the council tax:
49% agree (21% strongly, 27% somewhat
Most agree - London 57%, least agree - South West 42%
9. Some of the savings from turning off street lights should be returned to residents in affected streets through council tax:
59% agree (27% strongly, 32% somewhat

Related Sectors:

Personal Finance ::

Related Keywords:

AA = ::

Scan Me:

Most agree - North East 63%, least agree - Scotland 56%
Roads that are safe when lit can become unsafe with the lights switched off, but that is only shown when drivers, cyclists, bikers and pedestrians start to get hurt and killed
Edmund King, AA president

An insidious threat
AA President Edmund King comments on the street light switch-off revelations: "Worse accident rates on roads with street lights turned off or not present is an insidious threat that has crept in literally under the cover of darkness. Many local authorities based their risk assessment on police accident profiles for the affected roads. This had two huge drawbacks.

"Firstly and fundamentally, roads that are safe when lit can become unsafe with the lights switched off, but that is only shown when drivers, cyclists, bikers and pedestrians start to get hurt and killed. Some local authorities have changed their minds after casualties - Powys in 2009 and the scheme pioneers Buckinghamshire in 2012 - but why did people have to become street light victims to prove the point?

"Secondly, with an extra casualty here and there, it is difficult to spot a creeping overall trend that might suggest something is dangerously wrong with a blackout. The AA's analysis of reported accidents since 2007 shows that the faster the road and the worse the weather, the much higher the threat of accidents on urban roads that were previously lit through the night. Why? Because lighting illuminates potential hazards and gives road users a greater chance of avoiding them."

Low-energy lighting

It is distinctly possible that the accident and casualty rates would have been even worse had some councils not taken advantage of PFI funding to invest in low-energy lighting technology. That option is now closed to them, but the AA urges the Government to speed up the use of the £200 million challenge fund**, identified by the Department for Transport, for helping councils to switch to greener and more energy-efficient lighting that can stay on all night. Green loans, as pioneered with Glasgow, offer another alternative.

Without more switched-on thinking, a 70% street-light blackout in Essex and other councils will certainly cut costs and save CO2 - but it will be paid for in lives and injuries.

-ENDS-

Notes to Editors:

**The DfT has ruled out using PF2, the successor to the Private Finance Initiative, for highways maintenance but is keen to hear views on whether the £200m challenge fund should support local authority invest-to-save streetlighting programmes. DfT proposes huge shake-up to road maintenance grant regime, Local Transport Today, 24 Jan 2014, page 3.

For more information, please contact:

Katie Stephens
AA Press Office
E: katie.stephens@theaa.com
T: 01256 492 895 / 07738 791 909
?

Company Contact:

_

Pressat Wire

E. support[@]pressat.co.uk

View Online

Newsroom: Visit our Newsroom for all the latest stories:
https://www.wire.pressat.co.uk