Traffic calming for the prevention of road traffic injuries: systematic review and meta-analysis

F Bunn, T Collier, C Frost, K Ker, I Roberts, R Wentz

Objectives: To assess whether area-wide traffic calming schemes can reduce road crash related deaths and injuries.

Design: Systematic review and meta-analysis.

Data sources: Cochrane Injuries Group Specialised Register, Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials, Medline, EMBASE, Sociological Abstracts Science (and social science) citation index, National Technical Information service, Psychlit, Transport Research Information Service, International Road Research Organisation, Transdoc, and web sites of road safety organisation were searched; experts were contacted, conference proceedings were handsearched, and relevant reference lists were checked.

Inclusion criteria: Randomised controlled trials, and controlled before/after studies of area-wide traffic calming schemes designed to discourage and slow down through traffic on residential roads.

Methods: Data were collected on road user deaths, injuries, and traffic crashes. For each study rate ratios were calculated, the ratio of event rates before and after intervention in the traffic calmed area divided by the corresponding ratio of event rates in the control area, which were pooled to give an overall estimate using a random effects model.

Findings: Sixteen controlled before/after studies met our inclusion criteria. Eight studies reported the number of road user deaths: pooled rate ratio 0.63 (95% confidence interval [CI] 0.14 to 2.59). Sixteen studies reported the number of injuries (fetal and non-fetal): pooled rate ratio 0.89 (95% CI 0.80 to 1.00). All studies were in high income countries.

Conclusion: Area-wide traffic calming in towns and cities has the potential to reduce traffic injuries. However, further rigorous evaluations of this intervention are needed, especially in low and middle income countries.

Methods

Inclusion criteria

We included randomised controlled trials and controlled before/after studies of area-wide traffic calming schemes. Eligible schemes included those that involved a number of specific changes to the road layout, road hierarchy or road environment, for example road narrowing, road closures, creation of one way streets, changes at junctions, mini-roundabouts, road surface treatment, or speed humps. We excluded studies describing the enforcement of legal interventions, financial incentives or disincentives, and interventions investigating alteration to road signage or traffic lights alone, or studies solely describing interventions to separate different road users (cycle lanes, bus lanes, pedestrian walkways). The outcomes of interest were all road user deaths, all road user injuries (fetal and non-fatal), and the number of traffic crashes.
Box 1: Strategy for identification of studies

Search strategy for electronic databases; searches run in 2000

- Terms describing the intervention, outcomes, and study methodology were combined.
- A: the intervention—area traffic control* or TRAFFIC RESTRAINT* or traffic calming or traffic engineering or road design or road layout or roundabout* or humps or bumps or traffic distribution or traffic redistribution or traffic flow or crosswalk* or speed cushion* or chican* or road narrowing or refuges or road hierarchy or traffic hierarchy or four way* stop* or access only or sheltered parking or left turn lane* or wooner* or junction layout or road layout or lateral clearance.
- B: the outcome—accident* or injury* or fatality* or death or safety.
- C: the study methodology—evaluation or assess* or study* or evaluation or assess* or (controlled near2 stud*) or comparison or comparative or intervention near2 stud* or controls.

Web sites searched; searches conducted in 2001

- ARRB, Australian Road Research Board: www.arrb.org.au
- Australian Transport Safety Bureau: www.atsb.gov.au
- CROW, Road Information and Technology Centres for Transport and Infrastructure (Netherlands): www.crow.nl
- Danish Council for Road Safety Research: www.trm.dk/eng/veje/rft
- Danish Transport Research Institute: www.diff.dk
- DVR, Deutscher Verkehrsicherheitsrat Road Safety Institute (Germany): www.dvr.de/
- FINNRA, Finnish National Road administration: www.terhi.fi
- ITE, Institute of Transportation Engineers (USA): www.ite.org
- Swedish National Roads Administration: www.vv.se/for_lang/english/
- SWOV, Institute for Road Safety Research (Netherlands): www.swov.nl
- TOI, Institute of Transport Economics (Norway): www.toi.no
- TC, Transport Canada: www.tc.gc.ca
- TRB, Transportation Research Board: www.nas.edu/trb/
- TRL, Transport Research Laboratory (UK): www.trl.co.uk
- VT, Swedish National Road and Transport Research Institute: www.vti.se
- VTI, Finland www.vti.fi/indexe.htm

Conference proceedings handsearched

- Institution of Professional Engineers New Zealand (IPENZ). Proceedings of the technical session of the group at the annual conference of IPENZ; Auckland 8–12 February 1982.
- Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE). Transportation and traffic theory 9th international symposium; Netherlands 1984.
- Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE). Residential street design and traffic control 1989.
- Landor Publishing Ltd. The third national traffic calming conference; London 18 October 1996.
- The Technion Israel Institute of Technology. The second international conference on new ways for improved road safety and quality of life; Tel Aviv Hilton Hotel, Israel 7–10 October 1991.
- Transportation Research Institute. International conference on new ways and means for improved safety; Tel Aviv, Israel 20–23 February 1989.
- Transport Research Laboratory. Safety 91 Papers on vehicle safety, traffic safety and road user safety research; TRL Laboratory, Berks 1–2 May 1991.

Identification of studies

We searched the following electronic databases; Cochrane Injuries Group Specialized Register, Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials, Medline, EMBASE, Sociological Abstracts Science (and Social Science) Citation Index, National Technical Information Service, Psychlit, Transport Research Information Service, International Road Research Documentation, and TRANSDOC (the last three combined in the TRANSPORT database). One reviewer examined titles, abstracts, and keywords of citations, as given on electronic databases, for eligibility. Where possible the full text of all of potentially relevant citations was obtained. We also searched the web sites of road safety organisations, contacted experts, hand searched conference proceedings, and checked reference lists of relevant papers. There were no language restrictions. Further details of the search strategy can be seen in box 1.

Data extraction and analysis

One reviewer decided whether studies met the inclusion criteria, and this was checked by a second reviewer. Using a data collection form two reviewers independently extracted data on road user deaths, injuries (fatal and non-fatal), traffic crashes, characteristics of the intervention and control area, and types of measures implemented. To assess study quality we collected information on how the intervention and control areas were matched, duration of the before and after periods,
and, because of the potential for contamination, we also noted the proximity of the intervention and control areas.

For each study we calculated a rate ratio: the ratio of event counts in the intervention area compared to that in the control area. This gives the reduction in the incident rate in the intervention area compared to that in the control area. For the calculation of 95% confidence intervals, overdispersion reflects both underlying heterogeneity in rate ratios across studies and any variability arising through overdispersion if the assumption that events follow Poisson distributions is violated.

For studies with no events in one or more periods 1/2 was added to all counts in the pooled analysis. In the analysis of road user deaths, where the majority of studies had no events in at least one period, no test of heterogeneity was carried out, and a pooled estimate of the rate ratio was obtained from the column totals. Analyses were carried out in Stata version 7.0 (Stata corporation, College Station, Texas 77845, USA).

RESULTS
The searches identified 12 986 published and unpublished reports which were screened for eligibility. We obtained the full text of 586 reports and of these 12 reports, describing 16 controlled before/after studies, met our inclusion criteria (see table 1).\textsuperscript{10–21} We found no randomised controlled trials. Seven studies were done in Germany,\textsuperscript{10–12 16} six in the UK,\textsuperscript{13 17–21} two in Australia,\textsuperscript{15} and one in the Netherlands.\textsuperscript{14} all were done in the 1970s and 1980s. In most studies attempts had been made to match the intervention and control sites. However, in three

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study ID</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Participating areas</th>
<th>Interventions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charlottenburg\textsuperscript{11} (Germany 1977–84)</td>
<td>CBA, 2 years before data</td>
<td>(I) Residential area with small businesses. Area of about 60 hectares with 15 000 inhabitants</td>
<td>Different levels of road surface, road narrowing, chicanes, staggered lanes, speed restrictions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GST Borgentreich\textsuperscript{10–12} (Germany 1983–90)</td>
<td>CBA, 3 years before data</td>
<td>(II) Whole town centre: mixture of residential, commercial, and farm properties.</td>
<td>Road narrowing, redesigning major roads, traffic free zones, speed restrictions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GST Buxted\textsuperscript{10–12} (Germany 1983–90)</td>
<td>CBA, 3 years before data</td>
<td>(I) Mixture of shopping and residential areas. Area of about 268 hectares population of about 11 000 inhabitants.</td>
<td>Road narrowing, speed restrictions, and a wide range of traffic restraint measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GST Esslingen\textsuperscript{10–12} (Germany 1983–90)</td>
<td>CBA, 2 years before data</td>
<td>(I) Mixture of residential, industrial, and commercial properties</td>
<td>Reconstruction of major roads, speed restrictions, and renewal of residential roads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GST Ingelstadt\textsuperscript{10–12} (Germany 1983–90)</td>
<td>CBA, 2 years after data</td>
<td>(II) Most of the old part of the town, 5 500 inhabitants.</td>
<td>A wide range of traffic restraint measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GST Mainz\textsuperscript{10–13} (Germany 1983–90)</td>
<td>CBA, 2 years before data</td>
<td>(II) Rural suburb of 200 hectares with 11 000 inhabitants.</td>
<td>Reconstruction of public spaces including road narrowing and narrowing of road entrances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GST Moabit\textsuperscript{10–12} (Germany 1982–88)</td>
<td>CBA, 2 years before data</td>
<td>(II) Residential area of about 120 hectares near the city centre.</td>
<td>Rebuilding of major traffic roads, increasing level of vegetation in streets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rijswijk/Eindhoven\textsuperscript{11} (Netherlands 1972–86)</td>
<td>CBA, 5 years before data</td>
<td>(I) Road districts in Rijswijk and Eindhoven.</td>
<td>Road humps, road closures and narrowing, raised cross roads. Public spaces reclassified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swindon\textsuperscript{13} (UK 1975–81)</td>
<td>CBA, 2 years before data</td>
<td>(I) 2.8 km section of an all purpose road in Swindon – 87) 5 years before data.</td>
<td>Roundabouts, pedestrian crossings, changes to intersections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney-Canterbury\textsuperscript{14} (Australia 1981–87)</td>
<td>CBA, 2 years after data</td>
<td>(II) Predominantly residential area in city.</td>
<td>3 routes of similar layout and function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney-Willoughby\textsuperscript{14} (Australia 1980–87)</td>
<td>CBA, 2 years after data</td>
<td>(II) Predominantly residential area in city.</td>
<td>Speed humps, roundabouts, slow points, speed limits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USP Bradford\textsuperscript{17} (UK 1981–88)</td>
<td>CBA, 2 years before data</td>
<td>(I) Mainly residential area, population approximately 33 000.</td>
<td>Entry thresholds, slow points, speed humps, T-intersection treatments, roundabouts, and road closures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USP Bristol\textsuperscript{18} (UK 1981–88)</td>
<td>CBA, 2 years after data</td>
<td>(I) Mainly residential area of approximately 10 square km, population was approximately 32 000 in about 1 200 households.</td>
<td>Junction redesign, closure of through roads, and installation of central refinements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USP Nelson\textsuperscript{19} (UK 1980–87)</td>
<td>CBA, 2 years after data</td>
<td>(I) An area of 7 square km, population of approximately 30 000 people.</td>
<td>Junction redesign, road closures, and mini-roundabouts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USP Reading\textsuperscript{20} (UK 1979–86)</td>
<td>CBA, 2 years after data</td>
<td>(I) Approximately 8 square km, with a population of about 36 000 people.</td>
<td>Road closures, right turn bans, mini-roundabouts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USP Sheffield\textsuperscript{21} (UK 1979–87)</td>
<td>CBA, 5 years before data</td>
<td>(II) Mostly residential area covering approximately 9 square km, population approximately 50 000.</td>
<td>Road closures, traffic islands, central refineries, turning restrictions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CBA, controlled before after study; l, intervention area; C, control area; GST, German six towns project; USP, UK Urban Safety Project.
differences in the land use characteristics or type of district are reported,\textsuperscript{14} and in one the control area was much larger than the intervention area.\textsuperscript{15} Outcome data was collected from police or local authority records in all studies.\textsuperscript{10}–\textsuperscript{14}

Eight studies reported the number of road user deaths.\textsuperscript{10}–\textsuperscript{14} The pooled rate ratio was 0.63 (95% confidence interval (CI) 0.14 to 2.59). This result should be interpreted with caution since many of the studies include at least one period in which no road user deaths were observed. Sixteen studies reported the number of road traffic injuries (fatal and non-fatal).\textsuperscript{10}–\textsuperscript{21} The pooled rate ratio was 0.89 (95% CI 0.80 to 1.00) (fig 1), with statistically significant heterogeneity between the studies (p = 0.05). Nine studies reported the total number of road traffic crashes.\textsuperscript{10}–\textsuperscript{19} The pooled rate ratio was 0.95 (95% CI 0.81 to 1.11) (fig 2), again with statistically significant heterogeneity (p = 0.001). Thirteen trials reported the number of pedestrian crashes.\textsuperscript{10}–\textsuperscript{14} 17–\textsuperscript{21} The pooled rate ratio was 1.00 (95% CI 0.84 to 1.18) There was no significant heterogeneity (p = 0.21).

**DISCUSSION**

This systematic review of controlled before/after studies shows that area-wide traffic calming has the potential to prevent road traffic injuries. Although the effect of traffic calming on road user deaths is in the same direction as for injuries (fatal and non-fatal), because the number of road user deaths in the included studies is low the estimated rate ratio is imprecise. Indeed, the imprecision in the rate ratio may be understated by the confidence interval because the way that the confidence interval was calculated ignores the likely heterogeneity between studies. Although we found no reliable evidence that traffic calming reduces the number of road traffic crashes, because traffic calming may reduce vehicle speeds,\textsuperscript{22} this is not inconsistent with a reduction in the occurrence of injury. Our estimates of the effectiveness of traffic calming provide a basis for future cost effectiveness analyses that would be important in informing decisions about resource allocation.

Several methodological issues may have a bearing on the validity of these results. Publication and other selection biases are a potential threat to validity in all systematic reviews, but this is a particular problem in road safety where a large proportion of the available research is published in the grey literature. In this review only two of the included studies were published in journals. There are also problems identifying published controlled studies in the road safety databases.\textsuperscript{23} Search strategies for identifying controlled studies in medical databases can achieve high sensitivity because terms describing the study methodology are included among the indexing (descriptor) terms. Road safety databases, however, have a very limited range of indexing terms describing the study methodology. Despite our considerable efforts to identify all eligible studies, published and unpublished, irrespective of
Injuries as a result of road traffic crashes are a global problem and are likely to increase.

A previous meta-analysis, including uncontrolled before-after studies, found area-wide traffic calming can reduce road traffic injuries by about 15%.

This systematic review, of 16 controlled before-after studies, found an 11% reduction in road traffic injuries (fatal and non-fatal).

Traffic calming has the potential to prevent road traffic injuries but further rigorous evaluations, particularly in low and middle income countries, is required.

Because there was significant heterogeneity between the studies reporting the number of road traffic injuries and crashes, these results should be interpreted with caution. The observed heterogeneity may be due to differences in study design, in the types of traffic calming schemes involved, or in the way outcomes were defined and data collected.

The included studies were all conducted in the 1970s and 1980s, and, apart from two Australian studies, all were done in Europe. As a result it may make it more difficult to generalise from this systematic review and make inferences about the effectiveness of present day area-wide traffic calming schemes. In addition road traffic crashes are a major cause of death and injury in low and middle income countries where most of the casualties are pedestrians, cyclists, and riders of motorised two wheelers. Although traffic calming appears to be a promising intervention for preventing road traffic injuries because none of the included studies were conducted in low and middle income countries further rigorous evaluation is required in these settings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Authors’ affiliations

F Bunn, University of Hertfordshire, Centre for Research in Primary and Community Care

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