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It's a roundabout way to address a growing problem

Re-designing roads to stop elderly drivers crashing is not the way to go, believes **DICK LUMSDEN**

The issues associated with a rapidly ageing population are many and varied.

Every day we seem to be faced with another consequence of that perfect storm – the post-war baby boom from 1946 to 1964; coupled with advances in medical science and care; and improved social and living conditions.

The latest to emerge this week is that by 2025 there will be an estimated 1,000,000 motorists over the age of 85 driving around our roads.

Normally I am a champion for the older generations, and for them (us) to be taken seriously. But I'm not sure about so many more older drivers.

I fully support the desire for older people to remain independent for as long as possible. But it can't be denied that older drivers have slower reflexes, poorer eyesight, less mobility in the driving seat and probably less confidence than they had when they were younger.

My own father, who had been driving all his life, had the courage to say a couple of years ago that he felt it was time to give up driving, and now, at the age of 83 he has happily transitioned on to public transport.

So I was mildly astonished to read a report this week from The Older Drivers Task Force, calling for the Government to tackle the issue not by pleading with older drivers to stay off the roads – but by re-designing junctions and street furniture to make it less likely the pensioners would have crashes.

After reviewing accident statistics, the Task Force, part of the Road Safety Foundation, says that T-junctions should be re-designed and replaced with mini-roundabouts, and slip roads on to



■ Dick Lumsden is not best pleased by the idea of redesigning junctions to make them easier for older people to negotiate. Photo: CONTRIBUTED

major roads and motorways should all be separate entry lanes so older drivers don't need to look over their shoulders when merging with the fast flowing traffic.

They also say white lines should be wider, and there should be larger lettering on road markings.

Is all of this really necessary? Surely if an elderly driver is having problems seeing; moving their necks or not crossing traffic lanes fast enough to avoid a collision, then they shouldn't be driving. End of story.

Where will it all end?

Will the Environment Agency recommend draining all of our rivers to no more than three feet deep in case anyone falls in?

Will DIY stores start selling stepladders with airbags in case anyone falls off? Will we see

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restaurants installing table fans to cool down food in case we burn our lips on our dinner?

Beaches, cliff-tops, mountain paths or canal towpaths will all become no-go areas for pensioners in case we overbalance and fall in.

And there will be no more double decker buses, just single deckers

that are twice as long so no-one has to climb stairs while the vehicle is in motion.

I'm not saying we should not be taking the issue of our ageing population seriously. I feel very strongly that – in general – we are all ageing better than previous generations, so most of us will be able to continue to enjoy a good quality of independent life for longer.

Better product design, less complicated packaging, bigger type on supermarket price cards are all sensible and helpful things that are being considered now.

But re-designing the whole of our road network to make it less likely an elderly driver will cause a pile-up seems to me to be a step too far.

In my view it would be better to

encourage them to follow my Dad's example and give up their cars, and for more Government and local authority investment in better and more reliable public transport so they can continue to get about.

It will be another 25 years before I will be an 85 year old motorist. Maybe by that time technology will have advanced so much that we all have cars that drive themselves and the issue then won't be older drivers, it'll be primary school kids doing their own school run and just abandoning their cars at the school gates.

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