

Lee Waters AS/MS
Y Dirprwy Weinidog Newid Hinsawdd
Deputy Minister for Climate Change



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref LW/01672/22

Jack Sargeant MS
Chair - Petitions committee

6 September 2022

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter of 4 August regarding Petition P-06-1295 Hold a public poll on the reduction of the default speed limit BEFORE it comes in to force.

On 12 July the Welsh Senedd approved the legislation to lower the default national speed limit on residential roads and busy pedestrian streets from 30mph to 20mph.

The new legislation will not apply a blanket speed limit on all roads, it will simply make the default limit 20mph, leaving local authorities, who know their area best, to engage with the local community to decide which roads should remain at 30mph.

I am under no illusions that this is a huge behavioural change. Seven local authorities are currently taking part in the initial rollout of the 20mph settlement areas. The purpose of the phase 1 settlements is to use this as opportunity to learn lessons to shape the national rollout and to gather long term data.

A [Traffic Orders and 20mph public attitudes survey](#) was conducted among a representative sample of the public in late 2020. Four in five Welsh adults (80%) said they would support a speed limit of 20 mph in the area in which they lived, compared to one in five (20%) who would not. A [12-week public consultation on the default 20mph speed limit](#) was also carried out during 2021. The consultation results are quite different from the findings of the public opinion survey. The difference is likely to be the result of the different sampling approaches for each exercise – the sample for the public consultation was self-selecting, while the opinion survey sample was structured to be representative of the general population, thus minimising self-selection bias.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

The petition suggests that the only evidence available is 'theory and hearsay' however we would refer Members of the Petitions Committee to the substantial evidence base amassed over the previous 25 years on the benefits of 20mph. There is overwhelming evidence that lower speeds result in fewer collisions and a reduced severity of injuries; and consistent evidence that casualties are reduced when 20mph limits are introduced. For example, Scottish Local Authorities participated in a successful 20mph Speed Reduction Initiative during the late 1990's and I have attached a copy of the research findings for reference. Briefly, that study found that there was a considerable drop in the number of recorded accidents per year after the introduction of the trial 20mph scheme, and also a significant reduction in severity, with serious or fatal accidents reduced from 20% to 14% of the total.

At the present time, on average 80 people a year die on Welsh roads, 80 families whose lives will never be the same again. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) states that 45% of pedestrians get killed when struck by a car going at 30mph or less but only 5% when going at 20mph or less. The risk of being killed is almost 5 times higher in collisions between a car and a pedestrian at 31mph compared to the same type of collisions at 18.6mph. See chart 7 on page 8 for more information: [Reported road casualties: 2020 | GOV.WALES](#).

The petition also contains a statement about pedestrians and I would refer Members of the Petitions Committee to the [update to The Highway Code](#) made in January 2022. Cutting the number of deaths and injuries that occur on our roads every day is a responsibility we all share and knowing and applying the rules contained in The Highway Code could significantly reduce road casualties. The 'hierarchy of road users' is a concept that places those road users most at risk in the event of a collision at the top of the hierarchy and pedestrians may use any part of the road and use cycle tracks as well as the pavement, unless there are signs prohibiting pedestrians.

In addition, there is a strong evidence base that 20mph will have no negative impacts on air quality, with small improvements observed in various studies across the UK. For example, the Petitions Committee may wish to view a recent assessment of [air pollution levels in Richmond upon Thames](#), following the implementation of a 20mph scheme in late 2019 and early 2020. This showed encouraging early signs that lower speed limits may contribute to lower pollution levels. An [explanatory memorandum](#) was also published in June 2022, when the Restricted Roads (20 mph Speed Limit) (Wales) Order 2022 was laid. Public health Advisors have similarly informed Welsh Government that 'scientific research has shown that lower speed limits can reduce pollution where there is smoother driving behaviour. Emissions of nitrogen oxides (NOx) are 2 to 4 times higher under hard acceleration than under constant speed; therefore underlying that more acceleration, so to 30mph, will pollute more than accelerating to 20mph and then driving more steadily'. Finally, while not all of the available evidence suggests that 20mph limits decrease all forms of air pollution, it is generally accepted that they do not increase air pollution relative to 30mph limits (Archer et al, 2008; Journard et al, 1995; TEAG, 2013).

Further information regarding the introduction of 20mph limits can be found on our website at:

[Introducing 20mph speed limits | GOV.WALES](#)

[Introducing 20mph speed limits: frequently asked questions | GOV.WALES](#)

May I also refer Members of the Petitions Committee to our [Wales Transport Strategy](#). Climate Change is the greatest challenge we face and the Welsh Government and Senedd have committed to taking it seriously - making decisions that will not always be comfortable or easy, but are required for the future generations of Wales. The strategy has modal shift at its heart and changing the default speed limit from 30mph to 20mph will play an integral part. We are investing in active travel and are targeting 45 percent of all trips to occur by public transport, cycling or walking by 2040. This modal shift will in turn help reduce emissions by reducing the number of vehicles on the road especially those making shorter trips which could be made on foot or bike. As with any cultural change we know it takes time to win hearts and minds and inevitably we will face some challenge, but I am confident that if we all work together we can make the necessary changes that will benefit us now and in the future.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lee', is centered on a light gray rectangular background.

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