

P-06-1318 Exempt A and B roads in Wales from the proposed blanket 20mph speed limit.

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 13 Mawrth 2023
Petitions Committee | 13 March 2023

Reference: SR23/4917-4

Petition Number: P-06-1318

Petition title: Exempt A and B roads in Wales from the proposed blanket 20mph speed limit.

Text of petition:

A 20mph speed limit on A and B roads will increase congestion thus increasing pollution. Vehicles will also need to engage lower gears to comply with the limit, again increasing congestion. A and B roads should be exempt.



1. Background

In 2019 the Welsh Government set up a task and finish group to consider whether 20mph should become the default speed limit in residential areas. The Welsh Government accepted the group's recommendations, including that the default speed limit on restricted roads should be reduced from 30mph to 20mph.

Following public consultation and a pilot scheme across 8 communities, the Welsh Government laid the Restricted Roads (20 mph Speed Limit) (Wales) Order 2022 in June. The draft Order was passed by the Senedd in July and is due to come into force in September 2023.

1.1. Classification of roads

Roads in the UK (aside from motorways) are classified as follows:

- A roads – major roads intended to provide large-scale transport links within or between areas;
- B roads – roads intended to connect different areas, and to feed traffic between A roads and smaller roads on the network;
- Classified unnumbered – smaller roads intended to connect together unclassified roads with A and B roads; and
- Unclassified – local roads intended for local traffic. 60% of roads in the UK fall within this category.

Some A and B roads, or parts of them, will also be restricted roads - those in residential areas with a system of street lighting placed no more than 200 yards apart - and therefore covered by the 20mph default limit.

The legislation due to come into force in September 2023 changes the default limit on restricted roads from 30mph to 20mph. It will only apply to restricted roads and will not apply to the whole network of A and B roads.

1.2. Exceptions to the 20mph limit

It will also be possible for highway authorities (local authorities for local roads and the Welsh Ministers for trunk roads/motorways) to use Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) to change the limit from the default of 20mph where appropriate.

These will be known as exceptions. In November 2022 the Welsh Government issued [guidance to highway authorities](#) on the process for setting exceptions. This sets out two principal questions which should be considered by highway authorities when deciding whether an exception should be made:

Question A: Are there significant numbers (or potential numbers, if speeds were lower) of pedestrians and cyclists travelling along or across the road?

If the answer to A is 'no' then an exception for a 30mph speed limit may be appropriate.

Question B: If the answer to A is 'yes', are the pedestrians and cyclists mixing with motor traffic?

If the answer to B is 'no' then a 30mph speed limit exception may be appropriate.

If the answer to B is 'yes' then a 20mph speed limit will be appropriate unless the robust and evidenced application of local factors indicates otherwise.

The Welsh Government has launched [an interactive map](#) which shows where draft Orders are being prepared to exempt roads.

Senedd Research has [published an article](#) that explores the introduction of 20mph limits in Wales in more detail.

2. Welsh Government action

In his letter to the Chair dated 1 February, the Deputy Minister for Climate Change suggests the change in default speed limit will play an “integral part” in meeting the aims of the [Wales Transport Strategy](#).

The petitioner suggests the change in speed limit would lead to increased congestion and pollution. The Deputy Minister’s letter addresses these points.

3. Welsh Parliament action

In July 2020 the Senedd [debated the introduction of default 20mph speed limits](#) with 45 of 53 Members [voting in favour of the motion](#).

As outlined, the Welsh Government laid the Restricted Roads (20 mph Speed Limit) (Wales) Order 2022 in June 2022. The draft Order was passed by the Senedd in July 2022 and is due to come into force in September 2023.

In April 2022 you considered a petition calling on the Welsh Government to stop the introduction of the 20mph limit. At that time you agreed to close the petition due to the ability of local authorities to change the limit on roads where 20mph would not be appropriate.

You also considered a petition calling on the Welsh Government to hold a public poll on the speed limit reduction in October 2022. Again you agreed to close the petition.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.