

P-06-1210 Stop the Welsh Government introducing a blanket 20mph speed limit

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 15 Tachwedd 2020
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Petition title: Stop the Welsh Government introducing a blanket 20mph speed limit.

Text of petition: Speed limits should be set by local authorities and should be only 20mph where necessary.

1. Background

The Welsh Government is the highway authority and traffic authority responsible for the Welsh trunk road and motorway network. Local authorities are responsible for local roads.

In 2009 the Welsh Government published its current guidance on setting local speed limits. In line with this guidance the Welsh Government is responsible for



setting speed limits on trunk roads. Local authorities are responsible for setting speed limits on local roads with 20mph limits “encouraged where appropriate”.

The guidance also distinguishes between 20mph limits and zones. 20mph zones are designed to be “self-enforcing” due to traffic calming measures which are introduced along with the change in the speed limit. 20mph limits consist of just a speed limit change but no physical measures to reduce vehicle speeds within the area.

In May 2019 during Plenary, the First Minister stated “the Welsh Government believe that 20mph should be the default speed limit for residential areas”. The First Minister also acknowledged that local authorities would need discretion to maintain a 30mph limit on “key arterial routes”.

Impact of 20mph limits

Evidence on the impact of 20mph limits on issues like casualty rates, air quality and greenhouse gas emissions has often been described as mixed.

In 2018 the Welsh Government published a study on the state of the evidence for 20mph limits on road safety, active travel and air pollution. Also in 2018 the UK Government Department for Transport published research on the effectiveness of these limits. The UK Government Research found that:

...there is insufficient evidence to conclude that there has been a significant change in collisions and casualties following the introduction of 20mph limits in residential areas...

Recent research from road safety charity IAM RoadSmart found support in the UK for reducing the speed limit on all urban roads from 30mph to 20mph has increased in recent years. However its Director of Policy and Research suggests a blanket introduction of a 20mph limit isn't necessarily the best route, stating that:

Each situation needs to be decided on a case-by-case basis, with local considerations and consultation playing an important role.

The distinction between a 20mph limit and zone is also important when considering available evidence. Research from Queen's University found that while there was clear evidence 20mph zones with traffic calming measures reduced the frequency and severity of collisions and casualties, there was a lack of evidence on the effectiveness of 20mph limits enforced only by signage.

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 Its report, considered a range of evidence and made a number of arguments for the change. It summarised that:

Enabling a much wider take up of 20mph limits is expected to achieve significant road safety benefits, particularly in deprived neighbourhoods. In the longer term, reductions in the perception of road danger is expected to lead to more walking and cycling which will improve public health and replace some short car journeys...More walking and cycling is also likely to lead to greater social cohesion which brings further societal and health benefits. Lower speeds will lead to reductions in traffic noise, while impacts on air quality will be neutral at worst and journey time increases will be slight...

2. Welsh Government action

As outlined, 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 (those in residential areas with a system of street lighting placed no more than 200 yards apart) should be reduced from 30mph to 20mph.

In his letter to the Chair dated 14 October the Deputy Minister for Climate Change outlines that the first phase of introducing a 20mph limit has begun through pilots in 8 communities across Wales. The pilots will be used to gather data before a proposed full rollout in 2023. In September 2021 the Deputy Minister announced continued funding for these pilots.

The Deputy Minister's letter also outlines that the Welsh Government recently consulted on the proposals.

3. Welsh Parliament action

In July 2020 the Senedd debated the introduction of default 20mph speed limits.

In September 2021, Andrew RT Davies MS tabled a written question asking what percentage of the Welsh road network would fall within the planned 20mph speed limit. The Deputy Minister for Climate Change responded:

There are a total of 34,850km of public road in Wales. In terms of the 20mph project, it is anticipated:

- 60% will be out of scope as it has a speed limit of 40mph or above.
- 35% will automatically change from 30mph to 20mph (existing 30mph, not A or B classified).
- 5% will be reviewed through an exception process (existing 30mph, A or B classified), of which a small proportion would be expected to be classed as an exception to remain at 30mph. The majority will become 20mph.
- <1% is already 20mph

It is anticipated, the changes will therefore affect close to 40% of the total length of Wales road network.

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.