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Risk control
20's Plenty



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Introduction

Excessive or inappropriate speed can have a major impact on communities and also on the outcome of any collision. Overall, in 2023 1,624 people were killed on the UK roads and 28,087 were seriously injured. There are multiple factors that contribute to a collision with the main three reasons identified as speed, behaviour or inexperience and distraction or impairment ¹.

Despite vehicles becoming more powerful and able to reach top speeds quicker there is a change occurring across many towns and cities namely the lowering of speed limits. Local Authorities have had the ability to be able to use speeds other than 30mph or the National Speed Limit as far back as 1990, but more recently, 20mph is frequently used across whole town and city centres. The lowering of the limits are for the protection of vulnerable road users, the reduction of emissions and creating of safer communities.

Emissions

Air pollution is a major contributor to poor health with traffic a significant part. It is estimated to cause between 28,000 and 36,000 deaths ² per year in the UK alone. The main pollutants are formed from Nitrous Oxide (NOx) and fine Particulate Matter (PM2.5) in part produced from petrol and diesel cars. To combat this a number of measures have been introduced such as clean air zones, a switch to alternative fuels (such as hydrogen, HVO and electric) and the reduction of speed limits. It is estimated that reducing a speed limit from 30mph to 20mph has the effect of reducing PM2.5 and NOx by 8.2% and 8.3% respectively ³.

Safer Communities

A Low Traffic Neighbourhood (LTN) ^{4,5} is designed to make it easier for people to cycle or walk in their area through encouraging active travel. They can also help to reduce air and noise pollution. Urban realm changes can include a number of design interventions that restrict the number of vehicles using the streets. It is still possible to access homes and businesses but via an alternative route although there has been some opposition from those who live in these areas. Some of the changes incorporate methods to prevent access such as planters or bollards, small parks, one-way streets, and turn prevention into junctions.

Lower Speed Limits

High population cities such as London have committed to lowering the speed limit to 20mph on their roads which was expected to be completed by the end of 2024 ⁶. In March 2020 this began with all roads in the congestion charge

zone and will continue until 220km has been altered. These changes are part of TfL's wider Vision Zero plan where they aim to eliminate all deaths and serious injuries on the capitals roads by 2041. Many towns and cities are following suit in some form with Wales amending all 30mph roads down to 20mph from September 2023 with only minor exceptions ⁷. Since that date a public consultation has been launched due to public anger and local authorities are now reviewing a more targeted approach. This will result in some roads reverting back to the previous 30mph limit ⁸. As with London, this is now being enforced to ensure driver compliance. For Wales, amended legislation was passed in the Senedd known as the Restricted Roads (20mph Speed Limit) (Wales) Order 2022.

There are a number of identified benefits to reducing the speed limits in urban areas. It is reported that there would be fewer collisions and could avoid injuries to between 1200 to 2000 people per annum. A study found that if a pedestrian was hit by a car at 20mph the risk of fatality is 1% whereas if they are hit at 30mph that rises to 8% ⁹.

Some of these large-scale changes are quite recent so it is difficult to yet have longitudinal data showing if it has been successful in improving safety and improving the environment. Compliance checks in Wales only began in December 2023 but it has undoubtedly being controversial. A petition against it was launched and became the largest ever submitted to the Senedd in history. One of the criticisms has been increased journey times such as for those travelling to work and longer bus journeys, with buses arriving later than advertised. An initial review of journeys a week before and a week after implementation in Wales has shown for trips between 6am and 6pm post introduction half of all drivers were sticking to the new limit. There was a reduction in overall average speeds of 2.9mph amongst motorists during this time which is positive ^{10 (pg.10)}.

Types of 20mph

There are two types of enforced 20mph. The first is a 'Limit' and can be a wide area marked by a system of street lights and repeater signs. In Wales, this now means the system of lights but there would be no repeater signs. A 'Zone' is more targeted in relation to the space it occupies such as past a school or housing estate. It is distinguished by traffic calming measures forcing the slowing of traffic through engineering such as an uneven road surface, mini roundabouts, narrowing's and cushions cross the road ¹¹.

Management of drivers

For companies and drivers alike there must be strong management of infringements and the receipt of penalty charge notices (PCN's). With 20mph limits becoming more prevalent there is now more pressure than ever to assist drivers in ensuring they keep below the speed limit. There are clearly a number of benefits to this including:

- Safety of all road users
- Reputation
- Financial such as fines and vehicle damage
- Risk to the Operating Licence through poor OCRS scores
- Replacement vehicles and staff
- Maintaining a clean driving licence

Vehicles now have a wide variety of active driving aids that could be utilised to help drivers stay within any speed limit alongside the way that a driver uses the vehicle in relation to style. These measures can incorporate:

- Manual gearbox – using a lower gear so that revs are kept low and a good measure is 20mph in 2nd gear, 30mph in 3rd gear and so on.
- Automatic gearbox – place it into manual using the +/- or paddle shifts if available. This assists in locking in the gear so that it helps prevent speed creep.
- Speed sign recognition – the vehicle identifies the speed limit on the road through cameras as it passes the sign and displays the number on the dashboard with audible notifications if exceeded.
- Speed Limiter – the driver is able to set the maximum speed it wants the vehicle to be able to go up to and helps prevent anything over this. It can be used on any speed limit and drivers must be encouraged to set it at the speed limit and not over it.
- (Adaptive) Cruise Control – The device is set so that the vehicle maintains a constant speed and works best in free flowing traffic.
- Window Down – Even by lowering the window a small amount can aid in increasing perception of speed travelled.
- Satellite Navigation – This can give a visual or audible warning if the speed is exceeded although relies on the device being updated regularly.
- Training – to ensure drivers are fully aware of their responsibilities, understand the importance of staying within the speed limit, and how they can employ safety measures in the vehicle.

- From July 2022 newly manufactured cars across the EU and the UK must have intelligent speed assistance (ISA) fitted¹². This uses GPS and speed sign recognition technology so that when a vehicle enters a speed limit area, and has not slowed sufficiently, the engine power is limited to prevent it accelerating past the current speed limit. At present the system can be overridden but this option will eventually be removed by Government.
- Employ behavioural change techniques¹³ across the business to target specific behaviours and encourage change. This is a specialist area of psychology where techniques can be introduced such as setting goals and gaining individual intentions, monitoring feedback through technology, establishing self-assessment, providing practical support such as with social media and the impact of positive behaviour with KPI's and feedback. For a driver to change a behaviour they have to see there is a benefit to them and the consequences are more than they wish to deal with (points, disciplinary, crash).

Summary

With more and more areas altering speed limits, it is imperative that drivers understand how they can manage staying within the speed limit. For companies they have a duty of care and must initiate measures to help the drives to do so. Not only is it good for business but it helps save lives.

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