

**DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT CONSULTATION DOCUMENT -
SETTING LOCAL SPEED LIMITS**

Purpose of Report

1. To make Members aware of the Department for Transport's (DfT) consultation on the setting of local speed limits.

Background

2. In 2000 the Government published its Road Safety Strategy document "Tomorrow's Roads - Safer for Everyone" setting out a framework for delivering further improvements in road safety and long-term casualty reduction targets to be achieved by 2010.
3. The Road Safety Strategy contained a number of speed management related commitments, including the revision of guidance on the setting of local speed limits.
4. In November 2004 a consultation document was issued covering the setting of all speed limits on single and dual carriageway roads in both urban and rural areas. This supersedes previous guidance set out in Circular Roads 1/93. Comments from highway authorities and any other interested groups or individuals are required by 18th February 2005. A questionnaire has been issued (**Appendix 1**).
5. A letter was sent in December 2004, on behalf of the County Council, to all Parish Councils in the County to alert them to the revised guidance and encouraging comments to be made to the DfT. A full copy of the consultation document is available in the **Members' Room**.

Detail

6. Local speed limits are determined by Traffic Authorities having regard to guidance issued by the DfT. The previous advice has been applied in different ways by different authorities, with several adapting the advice by using different definitions and factors. The result has been increasing different approaches to speed limits. The Government considers that there is therefore a need for a more consistent and recognisable approach to setting speed limits at both national and local level. The revised guidance has been issued to address this.

Underlying principles of setting local limits

7. A study of types of accidents, their severity, cause and frequency, together with a survey of traffic speeds, should indicate whether an existing speed limit is appropriate.

8. The guidance states that before introducing or changing a local speed limit Traffic Authorities will wish to satisfy themselves that the benefits exceed the disbenefits. This should include an assessment of:-

Benefits:

- Accident and casualty saving
- Reduced emissions
- Improvement to the environment
- Reduction in public anxiety
- Reduction in severance by fast moving traffic
- Improved conditions and facilities for vulnerable road users

Disbenefits:

- Increased journey times for motorised traffic
- Cost of associated engineering or other physical measures and their maintenance
- Negative environmental impact of engineering or other physical measures
- Cost and negative visual impact of signing
- Cost of enforcement

9. An important factor when setting a speed limit is what the road looks like to the road user, such as its geometry and adjacent land use. Introducing or changing a local speed limit indicated by signing alone, without accompanying education and effective engineering changes to the road itself, is unlikely to have sufficient influence on driver behaviour to change actual speeds to below the new limit.
10. Speed limits should not be used to attempt to solve the problem of isolated hazards such as a single road junction or a bend. The minimum length of a speed limit should generally be not less than 600 metres to avoid too many changes of speed limits along the route. In exceptional circumstances, this can be reduced to 400 metres.
11. Research and experience has shown that a 'countdown' system of successive short lengths of road with mandatory limits at gradually decreasing speeds is not effective and should be avoided.

Urban Speed Management

12. The 'default' speed limit in urban areas is 30 mph. Local speed limits of 20 mph and 40 mph may, however, also be set where considered appropriate.

20 mph Speed Limit and Zones

- 20 mph zones are predominantly used in urban areas - both town centres and residential areas - and in the vicinity of schools. It is generally recommended that they be imposed over an area consisting of several roads.
- 20 mph speed limits should be used for individual roads or a small number of roads and are only suitable in areas where vehicle speeds are already low (mean vehicle speeds are 24 mph or below).

40 mph Speed Limit

- The roads most suited to this higher urban limit are urban dual carriageways and main traffic routes, eg ring and radial routes, and bypasses which have become partially built-up.

- Roads suitable for 40 mph are generally in the suburbs. They should have good width and layout, have parking and waiting restrictions in operation, and buildings set back from the road. These roads should not be used substantially by cyclists and pedestrians but should, where appropriate, have adequate footways and crossing places as necessary for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians.
13. The above guidance on urban speed limits generally accords with current practice in the County.

Rural Speed Management

14. This provides specific guidance on the setting of local speed limits in rural areas, the main points being:-
- (i) Speed limits should be considered as only one part of rural safety management.
 - (ii) First priority where accident rates are high should be to seek cost-effective improvements.
 - (iii) If high casualty rates prevail despite these measures, then a more appropriate speed limit may be considered.
 - (iv) Speed limits without supporting physical measures, driver information and publicity or other measures will not necessarily change driver behaviour.
 - (v) Every effort should be made to achieve an appropriate balance between speeds, speed limits, road design and other measures.
 - (vi) Traffic Authorities should particularly intervene on roads where there is a case for safeguarding the needs of vulnerable road users.

Village Speed Limits

15. Government policy states that, where appropriate, a 30 mph speed limit should be the norm in villages and reiterates the current policy set out in Traffic Advisory Leaflet 1/04 (TAL 1/04). It is also stated that it may also be appropriate in some larger villages to consider 20 mph limits or zones or home zones if lighting and other considerations allow.
16. If the section of road does not meet the definition of TAL 1/04 for a village, but the level of development is at least half the density implied in TAL 1/04 (over a minimum of 600 metres), a speed limit of 40 mph should be considered.

Speed Assessment Framework for single carriageway rural roads

17. An Assessment Framework has been developed to achieve an appropriate and consistent balance between safety and mobility. The aim is to achieve a consistent application of speed limit policy throughout the country.

18. The Framework differentiates between two tiers of roads based upon their traffic function:
- Upper Tier** - those with primarily a through function, where mobility is important, typically the 'A' or 'B' roads
- and
- Lower Tier** - those with a local or access function where quality of life benefits are important, typically the 'C' and unclassified roads
19. The guidance accepts that drivers and riders of motor vehicles, pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians have different views regarding what speed is appropriate on rural roads. Opinions also differ as to what constitutes a reasonable balance between risk of an accident, travel efficiency and environmental impact. The solution adopted in the Assessment Framework is to identify, for each type of road, the mean speed at which the total of the accident and travel costs is minimised.
20. The aim should be to align the speed limit so that it is not substantially higher than the mean speed currently driven on a road. An important step is to gain the agreement of the Police that the mean speed of drivers on a road with a new speed limit is acceptable.
21. The assessment process involves the following steps:
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|----|--|
| 1. | Consider whether the level of development requires special treatment. |
| 2. | Consider which functional tier is appropriate for the road. |
| 3. | Measure the current mean speed and accident rate (all injury accidents per 100 million vehicle km) |
| 4. | Check the accident rates against acceptable thresholds. |
| 5. | If the accident rate is high, check the proportion of different accident types against the investigatory thresholds recommended in Accident Analysis on Rural Roads and consider whether the site or route treatment is appropriate before deciding the speed limit. |
| 6. | If a speed limit lower than the current one is indicated, estimate the mean speed and accident rate and the influence on social factors that would result from implementing the new limit. |
| 7. | Check that these values are acceptable. If not, consider whether further measures are necessary to bring speed and accident rates into balance. |
22. This approach to the assessment of lower speed limits on rural roads is similar to the exercise undertaken in the County to establish the appropriate treatment of roads with above typical accident rates utilising the Local Safety Scheme budget.

Quiet Lanes and Home Zones

23. Guidance is given on the designation of Quiet Lanes which states that the aim of Quiet Lanes is to maintain the character of minor rural roads by seeking to contain rising traffic growth. The DfT considers that only minor roads or networks of minor roads which have low flows of traffic travelling at low speeds and are suitable for shared use by walkers, cyclists, equestrians and motorists are appropriate for designation as Quiet Lanes.
24. Home Zones aim to improve the quality of life in residential areas by making them places for people. The DfT considers that only roads which are predominantly residential and either have very low speeds already (well below 20 mph), or have measures applied to bring speeds down to these levels, are appropriate for consideration for designation as Home Zones.

Main Considerations for the Council

25. The previous guidance on setting speed limits, issued in Circular Roads 1/93 on which the Wiltshire speed limit criteria are based, is being updated. On completion of the consultation on the revised guidance on the setting of local speed limits the DfT is aiming to formally issue the updated guidance in Spring 2005.
26. At the March meeting of the Committee the 2005 Annual Speed Limit Review should be considered. The 150 or so requests for new speed limits are currently being assessed against the requirements for 30 mph limits in villages set out in TAL 1/04. A list of locations where the requirements for a 30 mph limit are satisfied will be presented to that meeting.
27. It is likely to be recommended that the new speed limits to be implemented in 2005-06 are taken from that list.
28. On receipt of the finalised updated guidance from the DfT, a further report will be presented to the Committee recommending the policy for the introduction of urban and rural speed restrictions in the County. This will form the basis for the future assessment of speed limit requests.

Environmental Impact of the Recommendation

29. It is a requirement of the Traffic Signs Regulations that speed limits have terminal signs and repeater signs at regular intervals, apart from 30mph restrictions in street lit areas. An increase in speed limits would require an environmentally sensitive increase in the level of signing.

Risk Assessment

30. A reasonable balance between risk of an accident, travel efficiency and environmental impact is required to minimise overall costs. The risk is that the correct balance is not achieved, as speeds increase travel costs decrease but accident costs increase, but lower speeds mean increased travel costs.

Financial Implications

31. No changes to the mandatory signing required or the statutory procedures involved in the introduction of speed limits are proposed. Accordingly, the costs of introducing a new speed restriction will not be altered with the new guidance.

Options Considered

32. Not applicable.

Reasons for Recommendation

33. To contribute towards the issue of revised guidance which will result in a more consistent and recognisable approach to setting speed limits.

Recommendation

34. That:-

- (i) The response to the questionnaire (**Appendix 1**) on the draft revised guidance be noted.
- (ii) On receipt of the finalised revised guidance on the setting of local speed limits from the Department for Transport, a policy for the introduction of speed restrictions in Wiltshire be prepared and presented to a future meeting of the Committee.

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The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this Report:

None

PUBLIC CONSULTATION - UPDATE OF CIRCULAR ROADS 1/93
SETTING UP LOCAL SPEED LIMITS

QUESTIONNAIRE

Draft Revised Guidance

The draft guidance is designed to enable easy identification of underlying principles and specific factors and issues that should be considered when introducing local speed limits in either urban or rural areas.

Question 1

Do you have any comments on the structure and layout of the document?

Response

Generally well laid out and easy to follow.

The draft guidance is designed to give a summary of where and why particular speed limits should be considered and the implementation process, giving cross references to where fuller details can be found in Traffic Advisory Leaflets and other documents as appropriate.

Question 2

Is the level of content sufficient? Do you feel that it strikes the right balance between covering the main points and not being overly cumbersome? If not, how could this be improved?

Response

The main points are well covered without being too detailed or resulting in a lengthy document.

Question 3

Is there anything omitted from the draft guidance that you feel should be included?

Response

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Question 4

Do you feel that the revised guidance will help form a solid basis from which to develop a speed management strategy as required under the Local Transport Plan process?

Response

Yes.

The revised guidance recommends that mean speeds should be used for the assessment of appropriate speed limits as they better reflect what the majority of drivers perceive as an appropriate speed for the road. This is a change from the 85th percentile speeds used in Circular Roads 1/93.

Question 5

What are your thoughts on this change? Also, in your experience, have you found there to be a consistent relationship between mean speed and 85th percentile speed?

Response

Experience shows general consistent relationship.

The 85th percentile speed is a well established indicator of the speed up to which the majority of drivers travel. Setting speed limits based on mean speed could result in a significant number of drivers exceeding a reduced restriction that is not considered appropriate by drivers. This could create enforcement difficulties and devalue restrictions.

Question 6

Do you feel that the revised guidance will help you to determine appropriate, and more consistent, speed limits?

Response

Compliance with the guidance would result in reasonably consistent speed restrictions. However, local issues are likely to result in variations in the speed limits introduced in different parts of the country.

Question 7

Do you feel that the revised guidance will help achieve a wider understanding of how local speed limits are set and why?

Response

Not for rural speed limits where the reasons may not be obvious to drivers why a lower speed limit has been imposed, particularly where there is no frontage development to a road.

Question 8

Any other comments on the draft guidance?

Response

It is disappointing that the environmentally sensitive issue of rural signing has not been explored more fully, particularly the need to sign limits lower than national limits with repeater signs. Also no consideration appears to have been given to the simplification of the procedures involved in the introduction of local speed limits.

Speed Assessment Framework

The speed assessment framework is designed to help achieve a more appropriate and consistent balance between safety and mobility objectives.

Question 9

Do you agree with the underlying principles of the framework and that the various factors on which the assessment framework is based are given sufficient prominence?

Response

The principle of basing a speed limit on existing speeds driven by drivers and the accident rate of the road is sound.

Question 10

Do you feel that the assessment framework will help you weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of each speed limit option and reach a well-founded conclusion?

Response

It will help a technical appraisal but taking local conditions and constraints into account could result in the assessment being overruled.

Question 11

The flowchart in Appendix C to the guidance has been prepared to assist the decision making process. Is the flowchart sufficiently clear? Could the flowchart be improved?

Response

The flowchart is clear.

Question 12

Did you trial the assessment framework as part of this consultation? If so please comment on its usefulness as a tool for setting more appropriate local speed needs.

Response

No - seems a very academic approach.

Question 13

On what type of roads did you use the assessment framework and for what reason? Did the assessment framework deliver the output that you expected? Was it helpful in supporting your own judgement? Did it cause you to reconsider your own judgement?

Response

Not applicable.

Question 14

Any other comments on the assessment framework?

Response

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The summary table at Appendix D to the guidance is designed to provide a quick reference guide to when each speed limit might be considered on single carriageway rural roads.

Question 15

Is this useful in its present form? If not, how could it be improved?

Response

Useful.