

Debate Pack

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Road humps and 20mph speed limits

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1 Background

A Westminster Hall Debate has been scheduled for Tuesday 5 December on Road humps and 20mph speed limits. The debate will be opened by Sir Iain Duncan Smith, Conservative MP for Chingford and Woodford Green.

1.1 20mph limits

In recent years there has been a growing trend for local highway authorities to reduce the speed limit to 20mph, particularly around schools.¹ The Welsh Government recently introduced a [default 20mph limit](#) on ‘restricted’ roads. Restricted roads are those with streetlamps placed not more than 200 yards apart, which are usually found in residential and built-up areas. In London, [over half of roads have a 20mph speed limit](#).² There are also plans to introduce more 20mph speed limits in other parts of the UK, including [Cornwall](#), [Wirral](#) and [Scotland](#).³

Measures reducing the maximum permitted speed of vehicles to 20mph are typically introduced in one of two ways:

- 20mph limits: this is where the speed limit has been reduced to 20mph as indicated with repeater signs, but there are no physical measures to reduce vehicle speed.
- 20mph zones: in addition to the reduced limit, traffic calming measures are also employed (for example road humps).

The [Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents \(ROSPA\) argues](#) [PDF] that (signed only) 20mph limits do not reduce traffic speeds as much as 20mph zones with physical traffic calming measures. However, creating 20mph limits is usually cheaper and quicker than installing additional traffic calming measures.⁴

¹ Following a Department for Transport request to English local authorities in 2016, 39 authorities responded, who reported that in their areas the length of 20mph road had increased from 1,474kms in 2010 to 4,787kms in 2015, an increase of 225% (see DfT, SNC Lavalin, Atkins [20mph research study - process and impact evaluation: headline report](#), November 2018 page 15)

² Transport for London Press Release [New data shows significant improvements in road safety in London since introduction of 20mph speed limits](#), 13 February 2023

³ Cornwall County Council, [20mph speed limits](#) [Accessed 1 December 2023]; Wirral Council, [20mph speed limit scheme hub](#) [Accessed 1 December 2023]; Traffic Scotland, [Transport Scotland's 20mph Speed Limit Initiative: Enhancing Safety in Highland Communities](#) [Accessed 1 December 2023]

⁴ Northern Ireland Assembly Research Paper, [Impact of 20mph speed limits](#), 10 March 2014, p12

In its [Plan for Drivers policy paper](#), published on 2 October 2023, the UK Government committed to updating “20mph zone guidance for England to help prevent inappropriate blanket use.”⁵

Changing speed limits

In Great Britain, local highway authorities have the power to vary the speed limits on the roads they control. Section 84 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act (RTRA) 1984 gives local authorities the power to determine speed limits on ‘unrestricted’ local roads in their area, i.e. all roads apart from motorways, A-roads and restricted roads.

Local highway authorities in England must ‘have regard to’ the guidance issued by the Department for Transport (DfT), currently [Setting Local Speed Limits](#) (DfT circular 01/2013).⁶ This states that speed limit reviews should be ‘evidence-led’ and sets out the key factors the DfT would expect local authorities to take into account and the speed limits they would expect to see on various types of roads, including urban and rural. Similar guidance has been [produced by the Scottish Government](#) and the [Welsh Government](#).⁷

Local authorities in Great Britain can change speed limits using speed limit orders, which must comply with consultation procedure requirements.⁸ These include requirements to notify other local authorities or emergency services who might be affected by speed limit changes, as well as the Freight Transport Association and Road Haulage Association.⁹

Local authorities in England and Wales also have a general duty under [section 16](#) of the Traffic Management Act 2004 to secure “the expeditious movement of traffic on [their] road network” and decisions about speed limits should be consistent with this.¹⁰

Changing the default speed limit on restricted roads can only be done by the UK, Welsh or Scottish Governments under Section 81 of the RTRA 1984.¹¹

In Northern Ireland, the Department for Infrastructure (Dfi) is responsible for all public roads, and can [introduce local speed limits](#) where national limits

⁵ Department for Transport [Plan for Drivers](#), October 2023

⁶ Department for Transport Guidance [Setting local speed limits](#) 18 January 2013

⁷ Transport Scotland, [Good Practice Guide on 20mph Speed Restrictions](#), 24 June 2016; Welsh Government, [Setting exceptions to the 20mph default speed limit for restricted roads](#), 8 November 2022

⁸ These are set out in Part II of [The Local Authorities' Traffic Orders \(Procedure\) \(England and Wales\) Regulations 1996](#); [The Local Authorities' Traffic Orders \(Procedure\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 1999](#)

⁹ [The Local Authorities' Traffic Orders \(Procedure\) \(England and Wales\) Regulations 1996](#)

¹⁰ [Section 16, Traffic Management Act 2004](#)

¹¹ [Section 81, RTRA 1984](#)

are not suitable, under [The Road Traffic Regulation \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1997](#).¹²

Speed limit enforcement

Speed limits are enforced by the police and (more usually these days) automated detection devices such as speed cameras. Penalties can range from a Fixed Penalty Notice of £100 and three points on the licence to a £1,000 fine and a disqualification.¹³ Drivers may be offered the alternative of a speed awareness course.

New 20mph speed limit on restricted roads in Wales

In 2022, the Welsh Government used powers under [Section 81 of the RTRA 1984](#) to change the default speed limit on all restricted roads in Wales from 30 to 20mph, via [The Restricted Roads \(20 mph Speed Limit\) \(Wales\) Order 2022](#).

This change came into force on 17 September 2023. Welsh highway authorities can designate and retain a 30mph limit where there is a case for doing so. These 30mph roads will be marked by signs in the same way that variations from the current default speed limit are used.¹⁴

In a [July 2023 press release](#), the Welsh Government said:

- the new 20mph default speed limit will save lives
- people living in communities that already have a 20mph limit support it
- it will improve the environment and help create safer communities
- the new speed limits are reducing speeds
- it is not a blanket speed limit and there are local exemptions from it
- 20mph speed limits are already used in other countries¹⁵

A [BBC News article on 20mph speed limits in Wales](#) quoted Vale of Glamorgan council that the average cost of installing a standard speed limit post and sign, together with necessary traffic management, is £1,044.52. The estimated total cost of the 20mph policy in Wales is £34.4 million (to date).¹⁶

¹² Department for Infrastructure, [Speed limits - how they are set](#) [Accessed 30 November 2023]

¹³ [Gov.uk: Speeding penalties](#) [Accessed 10 May 2022]

¹⁴ Welsh Government Press Release [Seven things you may not know about Wales' new 20mph default speed limit](#) 29 September 2022

¹⁵ Welsh Government Press Release [Seven things you may not know about Wales' new 20mph default speed limit](#) 29 September 2022

¹⁶ BBC News [Wales 20mph speed limit: Road's eight changes in two miles](#), 28 November 2023

A Welsh Government impact assessment, published alongside the legislation which enabled Wales' 20 mph speed limit, estimated the economic impact of the policy to be a "negative £4.54 billion" over 30 years.¹⁷ The Welsh First Minister Mark Drakeford [said that the £4.5 billion figure was 'notional'](#) and that the policy would save the NHS money every year.¹⁸

In a [poll carried out in October 2023](#), about a month after the speed limit was introduced, 59% of Welsh voters, including 51% of those who voted Labour in the 2021 Senedd Election, said they oppose the introduction of the 20mph speed limit, up from 34% who said they opposed the new speed limit in mid-September. Support for the new, reduced speed limit has correspondingly fallen from 46% to 29%.¹⁹

A [Welsh Government spokesperson told Wales Online on 17 October](#) that it was too early to measure the benefits of the speed limit change:

We recognise this is a major change but it is making our communities safer. We're gathering feedback from local authorities to help them apply exceptions to the default 20mph limit where it's appropriate to do so.

We're also continuing to work closely with emergency services and other agencies to engage with drivers about the benefit of slower speeds. It is too early to provide an evidenced based assessment.²⁰

In September 2023, [seventeen charities and organisations signed an open letter](#) supporting the Welsh Government's policy, saying the benefits went beyond road safety:

It's not just a road safety benefit. It also supports broader health, climate and societal goals such as helping the vulnerable to get about, improving social connection, reducing air and noise pollution, and more.²¹

Research on the impact of 20mph limits

There have been a number of studies evaluating the impact of 20mph limits in parts of England and Wales, carried out prior to the introduction of the 20mph speed limit in Wales. Key findings include:

Public Support

Once the 20mph limit has been implemented, a 2018 [DfT review of signed-only 20mph limits](#) found high levels of support amongst cyclists (81%), residents living in the area with the new 20mph limit (drivers and non-drivers) (75%) and drivers not resident in the 20mph area (66%), but less support amongst

¹⁷ [Explanatory Memorandum to the Restricted Roads \(20 mph Speed Limit\) \(Wales\) Order 2022](#) [PDF], p31

¹⁸ The Guardian, ['It's made people kinder': Wales prepares for rollout of 20mph limit](#), 7 September 2023

¹⁹ Redfield & Wilton, [Majority of Welsh Voters Now Oppose New 20mph Speed Limit](#), 18 October 2023

²⁰ Wales Online, [New poll shows true strength of feeling towards 20mph speed limit](#), 17 October 2023

²¹ 20s's Plenty For Us, [Open Letter Supporting 20 mph](#), 25 September 2023

residents of neighbouring areas (44%) and opposition from motorcyclists (29% supportive, 49% unsupportive).²²

Speed reduction

In advance of Wales' national roll-out, eight trial 20mph areas were implemented during 2021/22, referred to as Phase 1 of the 20mph programme. In March 2023, the [Phase 1 Interim Monitoring Report](#) found that 64% vehicles were travelling at or below 24mph compared to 45% pre-implementation, and that mean speed was reduced by 3mph.²³ A [Transport for London \(TfL\) press release](#) (February 2023) noted that monitoring of 20mph schemes since they were introduced found reductions of 1.7-5mph “across most sites surveyed” in London.²⁴ Across England, a 2018 [Department for Transport \(DfT\) review of signed-only 20mph limits](#) found a small reduction in median speed (less than 1mph).²⁵

Casualties

Lower speeds resulted in both fewer and less severe collisions, leading to fewer casualties. In London, a [TfL press release](#) (February 2023) noted that both the total number of collisions and collisions resulting in death or serious injury decreased by 25% following the introduction of 20mph limits. Collisions involving vulnerable road users decreased by 36% (from 453 to 290), while collisions involving people walking decreased by 63% (from 124 to 46).²⁶

Journey times

The impact on journey times is likely to be slight.²⁷ A 2018 [DfT review of signed-only 20mph limits](#) found that journey times are estimated to have increased by 3% in residential areas and 5% in city centre areas. This adds less than half a minute to a two mile trip and less than a minute to a five mile trip.²⁸

Active travel

There is some evidence that 20mph limits lead to more walking and cycling. Transport for Wales' [20mph Task Force Group report](#) (July 2020) noted that:

²² Department for Transport [20mph Research Study: Process and Impact Evaluation Headline Report](#), Section 3.2, 22 November 2018

²³ Transport for Wales [Default 20mph Speed Limit on Restricted Roads Phase 1 Interim Monitoring Report](#), Section 3.1, 16 March 2023;

²⁴ Transport for London Press Release [New data shows significant improvements in road safety in London since introduction of 20mph speed limits](#), 13 February 2023

²⁵ Department for Transport [20mph research study - process and impact evaluation: headline report](#), 22 November 2018

²⁶ Transport for London Press Release [New data shows significant improvements in road safety in London since introduction of 20mph speed limits](#), 13 February 2023

²⁷ Transport for Wales [20mph Task Force Group report](#), 15 July 2020

²⁸ Department for Transport [20mph Research Study: Process and Impact Evaluation Headline Report](#), Section 8.3, 22 November 2018

Counts during the piloting of 20mph in Bristol found small increases in walking and cycling. Self-reported increases in walking and cycling were also noted after implementation of the pilot 20mph speed limit in Edinburgh.²⁹

Air quality

Changes in air quality are expected to be negligible or show a slight improvement. Transport for Wales' [20mph Task Force Group report](#) (July 2020) noted that, while there is relatively little evidence for the impacts of 20mph limits on air quality, a study modelling the impacts of a 20mph default speed limit for restricted roads across Wales concluded there would be an overall improvement in air quality.³⁰

Noise

Slower speeds are likely to result in lower noise levels. Transport for Wales' [20mph Task Force Group report](#) (July 2020) quoted research that found: "higher motor vehicle speeds always lead to greater annoyance".³¹

1.2

Traffic calming

Road humps are one type of physical traffic calming measure, used to slow the speed of motorists. Other types of physical traffic calming measures include speed cushions, narrowing, chicanes, etc.³² The [Traffic Calming Act 1992](#) gives highway authorities the power to construct and remove traffic calming measures which meet regulations set out by the Secretary of State.

The DfT provides detailed guidance to highways authorities on the design of traffic calming measures in [Local Transport Note \(LTN\) 01/07 'Traffic Calming'](#). [The Highways \(Road Humps\) Regulations 1999](#) provide the statutory framework for road humps in England and Wales.

Design of road humps

Road humps are a type of vertical treatment, which aim to reduce the speed of vehicles by installing a raised section higher than the surrounding road. These are uncomfortable to be driven over if the vehicle's speed is too fast. They are the most widely used form of traffic calming since they have been shown to be effective at controlling speed and can be used with most road layouts.³³

²⁹ Transport for Wales [20mph Task Force Group report](#), page 9, 15 July 2020

³⁰ Transport for Wales [20mph Task Force Group report](#), page 10, 15 July 2020

³¹ Transport for Wales [20mph Task Force Group report](#), page 10, 15 July 2020

³² Department for Transport [Local Transport Note \(LTN\) 01/07 'Traffic Calming'](#), March 2007

³³ Department for Transport [Local Transport Note \(LTN\) 01/07 'Traffic Calming'](#), Section 4.1.1, March 2007

The geometry and spacing impacts the extent to which speeds are controlled by road humps. 75mm high road humps are recommended by the DfT, though [The Highways \(Road Humps\) Regulations 1999](#) allow for road humps to be up to 100mm high³⁴. [Local Transport Note \(LTN\) 01/07 'Traffic Calming'](#) identifies a maximum spacing between road humps of 150 metres, but notes “there may be more braking and acceleration than if the spacing is below 100 metres”.³⁵ For 20mph zones, spacing of 60 – 70 metres will be required.³⁶

Research by [TfL](#) and [Government guidance](#) suggests that certain types of traffic calming measures may be more appropriate for different vehicle types such as buses³⁷, bicycles³⁸ and HGVs.³⁹

³⁴ [The Highways \(Road Humps\) Regulations 1999](#) 4(1)(c)

³⁵ Department for Transport [Local Transport Note \(LTN\) 01/07 'Traffic Calming'](#), Section 4.2.6, March 2007

³⁶ Department for Transport [Local Transport Note \(LTN\) 01/07 'Traffic Calming'](#), Section 4.2.6, March 2007

³⁷ Transport for London [Traffic Calming Measures for Bus Routes](#), September 2005

³⁸ Department for Transport [Local Transport Note \(LTN\) 01/20 'Cycle infrastructure design'](#), Section 7.6.5

³⁹ Transport for London [Traffic Calming Measures for Bus Routes](#), September 2005

2 Parliamentary Material

2.1 Parliamentary Questions

[Speed limits: Greater London](#)

28 November 2023 | UIN 2694

Asked by: Mr Ranil Jayawardena

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to the oral answer of 14 September 2023 by the Leader of the House, Official Report column 1023, whether he has made an assessment of the cost to the economy in London of a majority of roads having a speed limit of 20mph.

Answering member: Guy Opperman | Department: Transport

The Department for Transport has not made an assessment of the impact of the cost to the economy of 20mph speed limits in London.

[Speed limits: Wales](#)

23 October 2023 | UIN 202804

Asked by: Julian Knight

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, if he will bring forward legislative proposals to rescind the decision of the Welsh Government to introduce default 20mph speed limits.

Answering member: David T C Davies | Department: Wales Office

As part of the Wales Act 2017, power for setting national speed limits was devolved to the Welsh Government.

It is disappointing that the Welsh Government seems to be ignoring its own impact assessments, which suggest a £4.5 billion hit to the Welsh economy.

The UK Government does not have any current plans to change the national speed limits, or to introduce 20mph as the default speed limit for urban areas in England.

[Speed limits](#)

20 October 2023 | UIN 202969

Asked by: Bill Esterson

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to The Plan for Drivers, published 2 October 2023, what 20mph zones his Department expects to be affected by changes in guidance.

Answering member: Mr Richard Holden | Department: Transport

Local speed limits are a matter for local authorities, who have the power to set their speed limits.

While the government supports 20mph limits in the right places, we do not support them being set indiscriminately on all roads without due regard to the safety case and local support. We plan to review the current guidance to English authorities to ensure consistency on setting 20mph speed limits and to be clear about the factors that local authorities should consider when considering new 20mph schemes.

[Speed limits: Wales](#)

8 September 2023 | UIN 196062

Asked by: Julian Knight

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, whether he has made an economic impact assessment of the decision of the Welsh Government to introduce 20mph speed limits.

Answering member: David T C Davies | Department: Wales Office

Speed limit issues were devolved to the Welsh Government in the Wales Act 2017, which amended the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.

In terms of the 20mph speed limit, it is disappointing that the Welsh Government seems to be ignoring its own impact assessments, which suggest that the damage to the Welsh economy could be as high as £4.5 billion.

The UK Government does not have any current plans to change the national speed limits, or to introduce 20mph as the default speed limit for urban areas in England.

[Road Humps](#)

6 September 2023 | UIN 196144

Asked by: John Stevenson

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps members of the public can take when they have identified a speedbump that has not been constructed to correct dimension specifications.

Answering member: Mr Richard Holden | Department: Transport

The Department for Transport provides detailed guidance to highways authorities on the design of traffic calming measures in [Local Transport Note \(LTN\) 01/07 'Traffic Calming'](#), which is available on gov.uk. [The Highways \(Road Humps\) Regulations 1999](#) provide the statutory framework for road humps in England and Wales.

Decisions on installing road humps are matters for the local highway authority, and they do not have to notify the Department of these decisions. Should there be concerns about specific road humps, members of the public should raise this directly with the local authority responsible for their installation.

2.2 Early Day Motions

[6th UN Road Safety Week](#)
EDM 23 (session 2021-22)
12 May 2021
Mr Barry Sheerman MP

2.3 Debates

[Road Safety \(Schools\)](#)

13 September 2018 | House of Commons | vol 646

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Press Articles

[Greatest support for 20mph speed limit in the South East](#)

Fleet News

29 November 2023

[Stats experts criticise 20mph 'one minute' claim](#)

BBC News

24 November 2023

[Where are 20mph speed limits in place across England and Wales?](#)

The Standard

29 September 2023

[20mph: How Wales' speed limit is shaping Sunak's election strategy](#)

BBC News

29 September 2023

[Conservative councillors issue statement on controversial 20mph zone](#)

Ilkley Gazette

26 September 2023

4 Press Releases

[Misinformation and the case for 20mph speed limits](#)

Sustrans

20 October 2023

[20mph in Wales: implementation and effectiveness](#)

Sennedd Research

17 October 2023

[On its 40th anniversary, do speed bumps still serve their purpose?](#)

Driving Instructors Association

12 October 2023

[TfL to launch 65km of new lower speed limit schemes to cut road danger across the capital and save lives](#)

Transport for London

11 September 2023

[New data shows significant improvements in road safety in London since introduction of 20mph speed limits](#)

Transport for London

13 February 2023

[20mph speed limits have little impact on crashes, casualties, driver speed](#)

British Medical Journal

15 November 2022

5

Further Reading

Library briefings

[Roads and Vehicle regulation FAQs](#)

House of Commons Library
20 March 2023

Websites

[The Plan for Drivers](#)

Department for Transport
2 October 2023

Reports

[20mph speed limits on roads](#)

Department for Transport
22 November 2018

[The state of evidence on 20mph speed limits with regards to road safety, active travel and air pollution impacts](#)

Welsh Government
1 August 2018

[Road Safety Factsheet, 20mph Zones and Speed Limits Factsheet \[PDF\]](#)

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents
November 2017

[Air pollution: outdoor air quality and health](#)

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence
30 June 2017

Petitions

[Hold a referendum on ending devolution in Wales](#)

12 October 2023

[Reduce penalty for speeding in a 20mph zone to 1 point, if speed is up to 30mph](#)

6 October 2023

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