



BRIEFING PAPER

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Speed limits in England

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Summary

This paper sets out the legislation and guidance on speed limits and how highways authorities can vary limits in their areas. It also explains policy towards 20 mph, motorway and rural speed limits and how speed limits are enforced. Finally, it summarises the policies of successive governments towards speed limits.

In built up areas the general speed limit is 30mph; on single carriageway roads it is 60 mph and on dual carriageways, 70 mph. However, highway authorities have the power to vary the speed limits on the roads they control – for example in urban areas, particularly around schools, there has been a growing trend for local highway authorities to reduce the limit to 20 mph. Similarly single and dual carriageways often have a lower limit than that indicated above – particularly as they approach heavily populated areas.

In January 2013 the Department for Transport published revised guidelines to local highway authorities on the setting of speed limits. Broadly this reiterated pre-existing policy, emphasising the options available to local authorities to introduce 20 mph limits in urban areas and to assess speed limits in rural areas based on safety criteria. It also launched a new speed limit appraisal tool for local authorities. At the same time the police speed enforcement guidelines were republished. These remain in force.

Speed limits are enforced by road traffic police and 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. Drivers may be offered the alternative of a speed awareness course. Some have called for a more pro-active approach to speed management and enforcement, with the use of Intelligent Speed Adaptation or speed limiters for vehicles.

Since 2010 Conservative-led governments have debated whether the speed limits on motorways should be increased to 80 mph, but there was no formal consultation on this and it is not now Government policy.

Please note that this paper applies to England only, this is now a devolved matter across the rest of the UK: there are links to the relevant legislation and guidance for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in the appropriate sections.

Information on other roads-related issues, including speed cameras, can be found on the [Roads Briefings Page](#) of the Parliament website.

1. Legislation

Part VI of the [Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984](#), as amended, provides the legal framework for speed limits. Section 81(1) lays down a speed limit of 30 mph on a restricted road. Section 81(2) allows a Minister to make an affirmative Order to increase or reduce the limit – this is not required for a change to lower the limit to 20 mph, see section 3, below.

Section 82 defines a road as a ‘restricted road’ in England and Wales if it has street lighting provided by lamps not more than 200 yards apart (the definition in Scotland is slightly different). It also allows the traffic authority for the road to make an Order specifying whether a road is restricted or not for the purposes of section 81.

Devolution

The setting of speed limits in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is a matter for the relevant devolved administration, by virtue of [section 42](#) of the *Scotland Act 2016*; [section 26](#) of the *Wales Act 2017* (to be implemented); and [Part IV](#) of the *Road Traffic Regulation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997* (NISI 1997/276), as amended.

The current maximum speed limits for single and dual carriageways and motorways were set in the 1970s (following variations – see below), These are 70 mph on motorways and dual carriageway roads; 60 mph on single carriageway roads (not being motorways); 60 mph on certain specified dual carriageway roads; and 50 mph on specified single carriageway roads.¹

In addition to these legal limits, highway authorities (the Secretary of State for Transport in respect of trunk roads and local authorities in respect of other roads) have the power to vary speed limits by way of Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs), made under section 84 of the 1984 Act.²

In April 2015 the Coalition Government increased the national speed limit for HGVs to:

- 50 mph (up from 40 mph) on single carriageway roads; and
- 60 mph (up from 50 mph) on dual carriageway roads³

As EU speed limiter requirements remained unchanged at 56 mph, it is now not possible for an HGV, provided it is fitted with the legally required speed limiter, to exceed a 60 mph speed limit.⁴

¹ *Motorways Traffic (Speed Limit) Regulations 1974* (SI 1974/502) and *70 Miles Per Hour, 60 Miles Per Hour and 50 Miles Per Hour (Temporary Speed Limit) (Continuation) Order 1978* (SI 1978/1548)

² Further information on the rules for making TROs can be found in HC Library briefing paper [SN6013](#)

³ Via the [Motor Vehicles \(Variation of Speed Limits\) \(England and Wales\) Regulations 2014](#) (SI 2014.3552), made under section 86 of the 1984 Act

⁴ Following public consultation, see: DfT, [Increased speed limit for heavy goods vehicles over 7.5 tonnes: dual carriageway](#), 28 November 2014; the first evaluation report published in 2016 found that HGV speeds had only marginally increased on these roads as a result of the change, see: DfT, [Evaluation of the national HGV speed limit](#)

1.1 History

Between 1865 and 1896 locomotives on the highway had to be preceded by a pedestrian carrying a red flag and were subject to a maximum speed limit of 2 mph in populated areas, and 4 mph elsewhere. The maximum speed limit was then increased to 14 mph and, in 1903, to 20 mph. In 1930 speed limits for cars and motorcycles were abolished because they were so widely ignored.

The [Road Traffic Act 1934](#) made it unlawful for anyone to drive a motor vehicle on a road in a built up area at a speed exceeding 30 mph. A road in a built up area was defined as a road having a system of street lighting furnished by lamps placed not more than 200 yards apart. The [Road Traffic Act 1960](#) introduced the expression "restricted road" to replace "a road in a built up area".

Other roads had no speed limit at all until 1965 when a maximum limit of 70 mph was introduced for all roads, including motorways. This came into operation on 22 December 1965 on all roads not already subject to a lower rate.⁵ The move followed a series of multiple crashes in November 1965 and was initially introduced for a trial period of four months. This was renewed for a further period to September 1967 to enable an evaluation of research into accidents by the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL).⁶ The limit was made permanent in 1967.⁷

In December 1973 lower speed limits were imposed as part of the Heath Government's energy conservation programme. Peter Walker, then Secretary of State, made a statement on fuel supplies in December 1973, during which he announced that a 50 mph speed limit would be imposed on all roads including motorways. There were two Orders, one of which covered motorways and the other which covered other roads.⁸ The restrictions were lifted in May 1974.⁹ In December 1974 the new Labour Government announced a reduction in the maximum speed limits on single carriageway roads to 50 mph and on dual carriageways to 60 mph.¹⁰ Further Orders extended the temporary speed limits to 1977.¹¹ In the April of that year the then Secretary of State, Bill Rogers, announced that from the beginning of June, the national speed limit on

[increase in England and Wales: year 1 interim summary, September 2016](#), 3 November 2016

⁵ *Motorways Traffic (Temporary Speed Limit) (England) Regulations 1965* (SI 1965/2063)

⁶ [HC Deb 23 February 1966, cc563-582](#)

⁷ [HC Deb 6 November 1967, cc773-95](#); and: *70 miles per hour Speed Limit (England) Order 1967* (SI 1967/1040); and *Motorways Traffic (Speed Limit) (England) Regulations 1967* (SI 1967/1041)

⁸ *Motorways Traffic (Speed Limit) Regulations 1973* (SI 1973/2059) and: *Fuel control (modification of enactments) (speed limits) Order 1973* (SI 1973/2051)

⁹ *Motorways Traffic (Speed Limit) Regulations 1974* (SI 1974/502)

¹⁰ [HC Deb 9 December 1974, cc38-44](#)

¹¹ *60 miles per hour and 50 miles per hour (Temporary Speed Limit) Order 1975* (SI 1975/1895); and *60 miles per hour and 50 miles per hour (Temporary Speed Limit) Order 1976* (SI 1976/1872)

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dual carriageway roads would be restored to 70 mph and on single carriageways the limit would be raised from 50 mph to 60 mph.¹²

¹² [HC Deb 6 April 1977, c1198](#); and [HC Deb 6 April 1977, c519W](#); implemented by: *70 Miles Per Hour, 60 Miles Per Hour and 50 Miles Per Hour (Temporary Speed Limit) (Continuation) Order 1978* (SI 1978/1548)

2. Guidance

When implementing or reviewing speed limits, councils in England must 'have regard' to the relevant Government guidance: [Department for Transport circular 01/2013, Setting Local Speed Limits](#), published in January 2013.¹³

Devolution

Guidance on the setting of speed limits in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is issued by the relevant devolved authority, see:

- **Scotland:** [Setting Local Speed Limits: Guidance for Local Authorities](#), ETLLD Circular 1/2006, August 2006 and [Good Practice Guide on 20 Mph Speed Restrictions](#), Version 2, June 2016;
- **Wales:** [Setting Local Speed Limits in Wales Guidance](#), Welsh Assembly Government Circular No: 24/2009, October 2009; and
- **Northern Ireland:** [Setting local speed limits in Northern Ireland](#), RSPPG E051, April 2010

In mid-2011 the Coalition Government indicated its intention to publish new guidance to local authorities on the setting of speed limits, along with an online tool to help councils make evidence-based decisions about local speed limits.¹⁴ A consultation on this new guidance was published in July 2012.¹⁵ The new guidance was published in January 2013 alongside the new [speed limit appraisal tool](#).

The guidance (Circular 01/2013) contains general principles and detailed advice. The **considerations local highway authorities should make in setting speed limits** are given as follows:

A study of **types of crashes**, their severity, causes and frequency, together with a survey of traffic speeds, should indicate whether an existing speed limit is appropriate for the type of road and mix of use by different groups of road users, including the presence or potential presence of vulnerable road users (including people walking, cycling or riding horses, or on motorbikes), or whether it needs to be changed. Local residents may also express their concerns or desire for a lower speed limit and these comments should be considered.

Where limits for **air quality** are in danger of being exceeded, compliance with those air quality limits could be an important factor in the choice of speed limit. But depending on the individual circumstances the imposition of a speed limit will not always be the solution. And the visible characteristics of a road affect the speed that a driver chooses: to be effective, the reasons for a limit need to be apparent.

It may well be that a speed limit need not be changed if the **collision rate** can be improved or wider quality of life objectives can be achieved through other speed management measures, or

¹³ Previous guidance in England was given in: [DfT Circular 1/2006, Setting Local Speed Limits](#) and [Traffic Advisory Leaflet 2/06, Speed assessment framework](#); and before that: [Road Safety Good Practice Guide](#), October 2001

¹⁴ "Penning endorses council decision to abandon speed limit review", *Local Transport Today*, 3 June 2011 [LTT 572]

¹⁵ DfT, [Consultation of revision of DfT's Speed Limit Circular](#), 13 July 2012

other measures. These alternative measures should always be considered before proceeding with a new speed limit.

Where there is **poor compliance** with an existing speed limit on a road or stretch of road the reasons for the non-compliance should be examined before a solution is sought. If the speed limit is set too low for no clear reason and the risk of collisions is low, then it may be appropriate to increase the limit. If the existing limit is in place for a good reason, solutions may include engineering measures or changes to the road environment to ensure it better matches the speed limit, or local education and publicity.

Enforcement may also be appropriate, but should be considered only after the other measures and jointly with the police force.¹⁶

It also contains tables setting out the environment and the type of road appropriate to a particular speed limit. These are as follows:¹⁷

Table 1: speed limits in urban areas - summary

| Speed limit (mph) | Where limit should apply |
|----------------------------|---|
| 20 (including 20 mph zone) | In streets that are primarily residential and in other town or city streets when pedestrian and cyclist movements are high, such as around schools, shops, markets, playgrounds and other areas, where motor vehicle movement is not the primary function. |
| 30 | In other built-up areas (where motor vehicles movement is deemed more important), with development on both sides of the road. |
| 40 | On higher quality suburban roads or those on the outskirts of urban areas where there is little development, with few cyclists, pedestrians or equestrians. On roads with good width and layout, parking and waiting restrictions in operation, and buildings set back from the road. On roads that, wherever possible, cater for the needs of non-motorised users through segregation of road space, and have adequate footways and crossing places. |
| 50 | On dual carriageway ring or radial routes or bypasses that have become partially built up, with little or no roadside development. |

¹⁶ DfT, [Setting local speed limits](#) (DfT circular 01/2013), January 2013, paras 23-26 [emphasis added]

¹⁷ Ibid., paras 110 (table 1) and 127 (table 2)

Table 2: speed limits for single carriageway roads with a predominant motor traffic flow function

| Speed limit (mph) | Where limit should apply |
|--------------------------|---|
| 60 | Recommended for most high quality strategic A and B roads with few bends, junctions or accesses. |
| 50 | Should be considered for lower quality A and B roads that may have a relatively high number of bends, junctions or accesses. Can also be considered where mean speeds are below 50 mph, so lower limit does not interfere with traffic flow. |
| 40 | Should be considered where there are many bends, junctions or accesses, substantial development, a strong environmental or landscape reason, or where there are considerable numbers of vulnerable road users. |

The previous Labour Government had announced in 2006 that it expected local authorities to review the speed limits on all their A and B roads and implement any changes by 2011.¹⁸ The Coalition Government decided not to press councils to complete their reviews.¹⁹

¹⁸ DfT press notice, "[Traffic authorities to review local speed limits](#)", 7 August 2006

¹⁹ "Penning endorses council decision to abandon speed limit review" *Local Transport Today*, 3 June 2011 [LTT 572]

3. Urban areas (20 mph)

There has been a “surge” in the number of 20mph zones being introduced in towns and cities in recent years. On October 2016 *The Times* reported on figures produced by the Department for Transport showing that the number of roads where the 30mph speed limit has been reduced increased by more than a quarter in a year:

The DfT surveyed a quarter of councils and found that 2,364 miles of road were 20mph areas in 2014, rising to 2,974 in 2015. Extrapolated for all councils, this would mean that 11,896 miles of road were designated as 20mph zones, with more than 2,400 miles being added in the past year.

The campaign group 20's Plenty For Us claims that 51 councils have introduced blanket 20mph zones, with another 10 in the process of doing so.²⁰

DfT circular 01/2013, referenced in section 2 above, contains guidance on introducing 20 mph limits. Further specific (but much older) guidance on implementing 20 mph limits can be found in [Traffic Advisory Leaflet 9/99, 20 mph Speed Limits and Zones](#), published in June 1999.

Campaigners have long been calling for successive governments to make 20 mph limits or zones mandatory in urban areas, particularly where there are schools and other vulnerable road users. The guidance does not mandate this. It states:

In many urban centres, main traffic routes often have a mixture of shopping, commercial and/or residential functions. These mixed priority routes are complex and difficult to treat, but the most successful measures have included speed management to keep speed at appropriate levels in the context of both 20 and 30 mph limits and a reassignment of space to the different functions, taking into account the needs of people on foot or on bikes. Sometimes a decision about a road's primary or most important function needs to be taken

[...]

Based on [a] positive effect on road safety, and a generally favourable reception from local residents, traffic authorities are able to use their power to introduce 20mph speed limits or zones on:

- Major streets where there are – or could be – significant numbers of journeys on foot, and/or where pedal cycle movements are an important consideration, and this outweighs the disadvantage of longer journey times for motorised traffic.

This is in addition to

- Residential streets in cities, towns and villages, particularly where the streets are being used by people on foot and on bicycles, there is community support and the characteristics of the street are suitable.

²⁰ “Slowly but surely, 20mph zones spread across nation”, *The Times*, 8 October 2016

Successful 20 mph zones and 20 mph speed limits are generally self-enforcing, i.e. the existing conditions of the road together with measures such as traffic calming or signing, publicity and information as part of the scheme, lead to a mean traffic speed compliant with the speed limit. To achieve compliance there should be no expectation on the police to provide additional enforcement beyond their routine activity, unless this has been explicitly agreed.²¹

In a slight change from the previous guidance issued in 2006, it also stated that:

The implementation of 20 mph limits over a larger number of roads, which the previous Speed Limit Circular (01/2006) advised against, should be considered where mean speeds at or below 24 mph are already achieved over a number of roads. Traffic authorities are already free to use additional measures in 20 mph limits to achieve compliance, such as some traffic calming measures and vehicle activated signs, or safety cameras. Average speed cameras may provide a useful tool for enforcing compliance with urban speed limits.²²

The Conservative Government, in the early 1990s, first introduced trial schemes of 20 mph limits. The system at first was rather cumbersome, with Government approval required in every case to change the speed limit, and high costs due to extra signage requirements and traffic calming measures. The Labour Government later abolished the requirement for local authorities to obtain Government consent to lower their speed limits to 20 mph.²³ It also increased the types of traffic calming measures (such as road humps and chicanes) that local authorities could introduce in support of lower limits.²⁴ In June 2011 the Coalition Government further announced that the signage requirements for 20 mph zones would be relaxed.²⁵

3.1 Effects and impacts

As to the effects of 20 mph limits, DfT Circular 01/2013 states:

Research into signed-only 20 mph speed limits shows that they generally lead to only small reductions in traffic speeds. Signed-only 20 mph speed limits are therefore most appropriate for areas where vehicle speeds are already low. This may, for example, be on roads that are very narrow, through engineering or on-road car parking. If the mean speed is already at or below 24 mph on a road, introducing a 20 mph speed limit through signing alone is likely to lead to general compliance with the new speed limit.

20 mph limits covering most streets in Portsmouth have demonstrated that it is possible to introduce large-scale 20 mph limits in some built-up environments. Traffic speeds in most of the streets treated were relatively low (less than 20 mph) to start with. The early evidence suggests that it is likely that some speed and casualty reductions have taken place and this is consistent with

²¹ Op cit., [Setting local speed limits](#) (DfT circular 01/2013), paras 78, 84 & 85

²² Ibid., para 97

²³ Via the *Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 (Amendment) Order 1999* ([SI 1999/1608](#)), which came into force on 16 June 1999; debated in Delegated Legislation Committee on [21 April 1999](#)

²⁴ For more information on traffic calming, see HC Library briefing paper [SN3437](#)

²⁵ DfT press notice, "[Minister cuts traffic signs red tape for local councils](#)", 9 June 2011

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previous research that has indicated that 20 mph limits without traffic calming reduce mean speeds by about 1 mph on average. A minority of streets in Portsmouth had average speeds of 25 mph or higher before the 20 mph speed limits were introduced and here the reductions in average speed tended to be greater, but insufficient to make the resulting speeds generally compliant with the new 20 mph limits. City-wide schemes may also contribute to changing travel and driving behaviour positively in the longer run, and the objectives of the Portsmouth speed limits spread well beyond improving road safety. Schemes need to aim for compliance with the new speed limit.²⁶

This referred to research conducted by Atkins Transport Planning and Management on the Portsmouth City Council area-wide 20 mph speed Limit scheme using signing alone, between 2006 and 2008.²⁷

There have been studies and reports looking at the impacts of 20 mph limits and zones, in particular their effects on vehicles speeds, accident rates and air pollution.²⁸ Success has to some extent depended on how local authorities have implemented the lower limits and the attendant changes they have made to the road space, in particularly whether they have been clustered in zones or are 'stand alone' limits on individual roads.²⁹

Most recently, Manchester and Bath have reported what they have called disappointing results from 20 mph limits, in terms of reducing accident rates and average speeds. These were met with a mixed response, with some campaigners questioning sample sizes and others emphasizing the importance of proper design.³⁰

There are also concerns that driver compliance with 20 mph limits is low, with one recent report indicating that a survey had found that more than half of UK drivers had admitted to speeding in 20 mph areas and another that eight out of 10 drivers 'ignore' the limit.³¹

²⁶ Op cit., [Setting local speed limits](#) (DfT circular 01/2013), paras 95-96

²⁷ Atkins for DfT, [Interim evaluation of the implementation of 20 mph speed limits in Portsmouth](#), 16 September 2010

²⁸ For a good historical overview, see RoSPA, [20mph Zones and Speed Limits Factsheet](#), June 2017

²⁹ See, e.g. "20mph zones on the rise . . . and so are accidents", *The Times*, 28 January 2015; and "City of London reports 1.5mph speed fall following blanket 20mph limit", *Local Transport Today*, 30 October 2015, [LTT 684]

³⁰ See, e.g. "City slams the brakes on new 20mph zones", *The Times*, 10 March 2017; and "20mph limits haven't delivered, says Bath", *Local Transport Today*, 26 May 2017 [LTT 723]

³¹ Brake press notice, ["More than half of UK drivers admit to speeding in 20mph areas"](#), 10 May 2017; and "Eight out of ten drivers ignoring 20mph limit", *The Times*, 3 July 2017

4. Villages and rural areas

DfT circular 01/2013 contains guidance on introducing speed limits in villages and on rural roads. Further specific guidance is available on implementing:

- village speed limits: [Traffic Advisory Leaflet 1/04, Village speed limits](#), January 2004;
- quiet lanes in rural areas: [Traffic Advisory Leaflet 3/04, Quiet lanes](#), June 2004; and
- quiet lanes and Home Zones: [DfT circular 2/2006, The Quiet lanes and Home Zones \(England\) Regulations 2006](#), August 2006.

DfT Circular 01/2013 summarises the key points for rural speed management as follows:

The national speed limit on the rural road network is 60 mph on single carriageway roads and 70 mph on dual carriageways.

Rural dual carriageways with segregated junctions and facilities for vulnerable road users would generally be suitable for 70 mph limits. However, a lower limit may be appropriate if, for example, a collision history indicates that this cannot be achieved safely.

[...] The speed limit on single carriageway rural roads should take into account the history of collisions, the road's function, existing mean traffic speed, use by vulnerable road users, the road's geometry and engineering, and the road environment including level of road-side development.

It is government policy that a 30 mph speed limit should be the norm in villages. It may also be appropriate to consider 20 mph zones and limits in built-up village streets.

It is recommended that the minimum length of a village speed limit should be 600 metres. However, traffic authorities may lower this to 400 metres, and in exceptional circumstances to 300 metres.³²

On the lowering of rural speed limits, it states that "Inappropriate speed, at levels below the legal limit but above those appropriate for the road at the time (for example, because of the weather conditions or because vulnerable road users are present), is a particular problem for rural roads" and continues:

Speed limit changes are therefore unlikely to fully address this problem and should therefore be considered only as one part of rural safety management. Where collision and casualty rates are high, traffic authorities should first seek to understand the particular types of crashes taking place and their causes, to allow them to choose effective solutions to reduce the risk.³³

It goes on to explain where a lower limit of 40 mph or 50 mph may be appropriate on C and unclassified roads in particular circumstances:

For C and Unclassified roads with important access and recreational function, the following speed limits are deemed

³² Op cit., [Setting local speed limits](#) (DfT circular 01/2013), section 7, key points

³³ Ibid., paras 113-114

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appropriate and traffic authorities should use these as guidance when reviewing the speed limits on these roads:

- The national speed limit of 60 mph is only appropriate for the best quality C and Unclassified roads with a mixed (i.e. partial traffic flow) function with few bends, junctions or accesses. In the longer term, these roads should be assessed against through-traffic criteria. For lower quality C and Unclassified roads with a mixed function and high numbers of bends, junctions or accesses 50 mph may be appropriate.
- A speed limit of 40 mph may be considered for roads with a predominantly local, access or recreational function, for example in national parks or areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONB), or across, or adjacent to, unenclosed common land; or if they form part of a recommended route for vulnerable road users. It may also be appropriate if there is a particular collision problem.

It is important to note that the above does not imply that speed limits should automatically be reduced. Indeed, in some cases the assessment may suggest that the existing speed limit may be too low, and a higher speed limit should be considered, as it is likely to be achievable safely.³⁴

The guidance on villages refers back to TAL 1/04, mentioned above. The 2013 Circular states that, in summary:

It is ... government policy that a 30 mph speed limit should be the norm through villages. It may also be appropriate to consider 20 mph limits or zones in built up village streets which are primarily residential in nature, or where pedestrian and cyclist movements are high. Such limits should not, however, be considered on roads with a strategic function or where the movement of motor vehicles is the primary function.³⁵

The problem of speeding vehicles in villages has been of concern for 25 years and were examined by the Village Speed Control Working Group (VISP) back in the 1990s.³⁶ The Labour Government took the view that a general 60 mph limit on rural roads was not always appropriate for the conditions, and proposed that a 'rural road hierarchy' should be defined to help manage speed in these areas.³⁷ The only policy change in this area came in 2000: section 268 of the [Transport Act 2000](#), as amended, enabled local traffic authorities to designate roads as Home Zones or quiet lanes.³⁸

As indicated above, the Government guidance talks about the incidence of 'inappropriate speed' on rural roads, which is driving within the legal limit but inappropriately for the prevailing conditions. Other research

³⁴ Ibid., paras 128-129

³⁵ Ibid., paras 131-132

³⁶ Composed of members of the county surveyors' society, the Department of Transport, and the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL); see DoT, [VISP – a summary](#) (TAL 1/94), June 1994

³⁷ DETR, [New directions in speed management: a review of policy](#), March 2000, paras 137-138; a progress report was published 18 months later, see: DTLR, [Development of a rural road hierarchy for speed management, a progress report](#), October 2001

³⁸ Quiet lanes are minor rural roads which are appropriate for shared use by walkers, cyclists, horse riders and motorised users

has shown that in 2014 one in five surveyed drivers admitted breaking speed limits on country roads in the previous year.³⁹

³⁹ Brake press notice, "[Drivers urged: don't treat country roads like racetracks this summer, as one in three admit driving too fast](#)", 24 July 2014

5. Motorways (80 mph)

As set out in section 1, above, the maximum speed limit for motorways has been set at 70 mph since the late 1970s.

Over the years the question of increasing the limit has been raised. The Department for Transport assessed the possible effects of raising the motorway speed limit to 80 mph in 2001 under the Labour Government. The review looked at the potential impacts on accidents, speed distribution, noise, pollution and congestion. A factual note summarising the conclusions was published in 2006 under FOI. It showed economic benefits from raising the limit, with some negative environmental impacts.⁴⁰

In 2004 PACTS, the road safety group, published a paper which stated that raising the limit to 80 mph would likely increase road casualties.⁴¹ A 2005 paper by the Association of British Drivers concluded that increasing the speed limit would result in significant economic benefits from time savings that would greatly outweigh the additional costs of resources consumed.⁴²

Over the past six years or so there has been further debate about whether the limit should be raised to 80 mph. In early 2011 there was press speculation that the Coalition Government intended to look at raising the motorway speed limit to 80 mph.⁴³ In October 2011 the then Secretary of State for Transport, Philip Hammond, confirmed the Government's intention to consult on raising the maximum speed limit from 70 to 80 mph.⁴⁴ However, this never happened.

There were various reports in 2013 that the idea had been 'scrapped' or that trials would go ahead in the near future.⁴⁵ There was also speculation that the idea had been abandoned "because of fears that the change would alienate women voters".⁴⁶ This was followed in 2014 by speculation that the Government would reduce the motorway speed limit rather than increase it. Highways England rejected this speculation, made in the context of the Government's plans for 'smart motorways'.⁴⁷

By 2015 there were reports that an increase to 80 mph might be back on the Government's agenda. *The Times* reported in January 2015 that then Secretary of State for Transport, Sir Patrick McLoughlin, had said that he would consider proposals for faster roads as it introduced more

⁴⁰ DfT, [The estimated effects of an 80 mph speed limit on motorways](#), 2001

⁴¹ PACTS, [Increasing the Motorway Speed Limit](#), PACTS PB02/04, March 2004

⁴² ABD, [Submission for the Raising of the Motorway Speed Limit](#), 2005

⁴³ "Minister signals 80mph limit", *The Times*, 27 February 2011

⁴⁴ DfT press notice, "[Government Proposes 80mph Motorway Speed Limit](#)", 3 October 2011

⁴⁵ See, e.g. "[80mph speed limit plan for motorways 'to be scrapped'](#)", *Daily Telegraph*, 17 February 2013 and "[80mph motorway speed limit trials start next year: Three test sites proposed as minister says issue is still firmly on Government's agenda](#)", *Daily Mail*, 12 June 2013

⁴⁶ "Female votes put the brake on 80mph speed limit", *The Times*, 22 June 2013

⁴⁷ See, e.g. Highways Agency, [Highways Agency's response to article in the Daily Telegraph on 14 May 2014](#), 14 May 2014 and DfT press notice, "[Faster journeys for Britain's drivers as work starts on smart motorway](#)", 8 July 2014

'smart motorways' over the following two years, and that he was concerned "about the apparent over-zealous policing of existing 70mph limits".⁴⁸ However, by the end of 2015 the Government's line was that "There are no plans to increase the motorway speed limit to 80 mph or to increase national speed limits by 10mph ... The focus of government policy on our road network is the delivery of a step change in investment".⁴⁹

Most recently, the Roads Minister, Jesse Norman, said:

Any change to the speed limit would have to be based on a full and sound understanding of the wider safety, environmental and other impacts of such a change.

A previous Government made an initial assessment of the possibility of introducing trials of 80 mph limits. A decision on whether to change the limit would be for this Government but we currently have no plans to do so.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ "Raising motorway limit to 80mph is back on course", *The Times*, 24 January 2015

⁴⁹ [Motorways: Speed Limits: Written question – 12803](#), 29 October 2015

⁵⁰ [Motorways: Speed Limits: Written question – 900474](#), 13 July 2017

6. Enforcement

Police forces continue to follow the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) guidance to chief constables on speed enforcement policy, updated in 2013.⁵¹

The guidance states that the enforcement of traffic law by the police should be guided by the principles of:

Proportionality in applying the law and securing compliance;

Targeting of enforcement action;

Consistency of approach; and

Transparency about what enforcement action is undertaken, any why.

This needs to be with the recognition that effective **partnerships** with other organisations are essential.⁵²

The guidance states that it is anticipated that, other than in the most exceptional circumstances (arrest), the issue of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) and summonses is likely to be the minimum appropriate enforcement action as soon as the following speeds have been reached:⁵³

| Limit | Device tolerance | Fixed Penalty when education is not appropriate | Speed Awareness if appropriate | | Summons in all other cases and above |
|--------|------------------|---|--------------------------------|--------|--------------------------------------|
| | | | From | To | |
| 20 mph | 22mph | 24 mph | 24 mph | 31 mph | 35 mph |
| 30 mph | 32 mph | 35 mph | 35 mph | 42 mph | 50 mph |
| 40 mph | 42 mph | 46 mph | 46 mph | 53 mph | 66 mph |
| 50 mph | 52 mph | 57 mph | 57 mph | 64 mph | 76 mph |
| 60 mph | 62 mph | 68 mph | 68 mph | 75 mph | 86 mph |
| 70 mph | 73 mph | 79 mph | 79 mph | 86 mph | 96 mph |

All speeds identified above are those shown on the speed device, speedometer or other detection devices

These guidelines are reiterated in the Crown Prosecution Service's guidance on fixed penalty notices.⁵⁴

However, the ACPO guidance also states that the guidelines "do not and cannot replace the police officer's discretion":

Where an officer decides to issue a summons or a fixed penalty notice in respect of offences committed at speeds lower than those set out in the table, he or she must consider the tolerances

Information on enforcement of speeding with the use of cameras can be found in HC Library briefing paper [SN350](#).

⁵¹ ACPO no longer exists and is now the [National Police Chiefs Council \(NPCC\)](#); for previous edition, see: ACPO, [Speed enforcement guidelines](#), 9 October 2002

⁵² ACPO, [Speed Enforcement Policy Guidelines 2011-2015: Joining Forces for Safer Roads](#), 2013, p6

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p8

⁵⁴ CPS, [Road Traffic Offences: Guidance on Fixed Penalty Notices](#) [accessed 29 August 2017]

of the equipment used to corroborate their opinion. Police speed equipment are tested and approved to work with a maximum tolerance of +/-2mph up to 66mph and 3% for all speeds higher than 66mph, so it is possible to use these tolerances as a prosecution threshold. Moreover, in particular circumstances, driving at speeds lower than the legal limit may result in prosecution for other offences, for example dangerous driving or driving without due care and attention when the speed is inappropriate and inherently unsafe.⁵⁵

A fixed penalty involves payment of £100 and three penalty points;⁵⁶ however, if a case goes to court magistrates may impose a fine of up to £1,000 and endorse with three to six points.

Section 17 of the [Road Safety Act 2006](#) extended the range of possible penalty points, so that provision could be made for a more graduated arrangement of fixed penalties in respect of speeding offences. Despite a consultation issued by the Labour Government before it left office nothing further has happened on this.⁵⁷

6.1 Enforcing 20 mph limits

The enforcement of 20 mph speed limits is the same as any other speed limit – i.e. if you break the limit and are caught you can expect a fine and points on your licence. Where there is often concern is about the idea that the speed limit should be ‘self-enforcing’. In its September 2015 report on 20 mph limits, Brake the road safety charity explained concerns about police enforcement as follows:

Councils are often strongly influenced by the police position. This can come from the force in their area, or the advice from the National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC), formerly the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO).

The police position is outlined in the ACPO Speed Enforcement Guidelines. It states that – as with all speed limits – 20mph limits should be largely “self-enforcing”: that is, that the road should look and feel like a 20mph limit. That look and feel is from the perspective of the “visiting motorist”. Thus, the police position is to advise to “only introduce where average speeds are already close to the limit imposed (24 in a proposed 20mph area) or with interventions that make the limit clear to visiting motorists”.

Councils appear to take slightly varying views of the police position, but overall the issue of enforcement is a common concern, with councils conscious that resource is lacking for police to enforce 20mph limits. One stated, “Our key concern is enforceability - without the use of expensive and unpopular measures enforcement would rely upon a heavy and unrealistic commitment from the police.”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Op cit., [Speed Enforcement Policy Guidelines 2011-2015: Joining Forces for Safer Roads](#), p8

⁵⁶ Increased from £60 in August 2013, see: [Fixed Penalty \(Amendment\) Order 2013 \(SI 2013/1569\)](#)

⁵⁷ DfT, [Road safety compliance consultation](#), November 2008, para 2.39

⁵⁸ Brake, [Go 20: Towards changing the default urban speed limit to 20mph](#), September 2015, p8

The guidance to which it refers is the 2013 ACPO guidance. Section 11 and Appendix A discuss 20 mph limits in detail. The key point is as follows:

Police position on all speed limits including 20mph

It is important that the police position on all speed limits, including 20mph, is clearly articulated by all:

Enforcement will be considered in all clearly posted limits, given other priorities, and this will be by:

1. Targeted enforcement where there is deliberate offending/disregarding and the limits are clear;
2. Where limits are not clear (that is they don't feel/look like the limit or are on inappropriate roads), they will not be routinely enforced (routinely means regular planned attendance where there isn't intelligence of deliberate offending) only targeted where there is intelligence of obvious deliberate disregard.

It is very important that the service doesn't unintentionally give the impression that the police will not enforce the law. As with all crimes and speed limits the police will use their discretion when to enforce and how that enforcement might take place. Unclear or even confusing limits (all limits not just 20s) will undoubtedly lead to mistaken offending and any aggressive enforcement risks a loss of public support for the action and more importantly the police service. Enforcement cannot and must not take the place of proper engineering and or clear signing.⁵⁹

The Government has said repeatedly that enforcement is a matter for the police.⁶⁰

6.2 Changes to levels of speeding fines, 2017

The level of speeding fines issued by the courts has long been related to weekly income. Under changes made to the relevant sentencing guidelines from April 2017 fines for the most serious speeding offence will increase from a Band B fine to a Band C fine. This will increase the starting point to 150% of relevant weekly income (from 100%)

In May 2016 the Sentencing Council published a consultation on new draft Magistrates' Court Sentencing Guidelines (MCSG). The MCSG had last been fully updated in 2008 by the predecessor body of the Sentencing Council, the Sentencing Guidelines Council. The Council stated that the revision to the guidelines was "not intended to result in significant changes to current sentencing levels".⁶¹

The Council made a number of changes to the guidelines following the consultation. One of the changes identified in the consultation response was with regard to speeding. It stated:

The structure of the speeding guideline is different to the other guidelines within the MCSG package as it focuses on the speed

⁵⁹ Op cit., [Speed Enforcement Policy Guidelines 2011-2015: Joining Forces for Safer Roads](#), Appendix A

⁶⁰ e.g. [Driving Offences: Speed Limits: Written question - HL5357](#), 5 March 2015

⁶¹ Sentencing Council press notice, "[Sentencing Council publishes proposed revisions to magistrates' court guidelines](#)", 19 May 2016

that the offender was driving in relation to the speed limit, rather than an assessment of culpability and harm. Consultees were asked if they agreed with the proposed structure of the guideline. 76 per cent agreed. A number of respondents made additional comments and some called for higher penalties [...] The Council considered these views and agreed to increase the penalty for the top band of seriousness from a Band B to a Band C fine, to ensure that there is clear increase in penalty as the seriousness of offending increases.⁶²

A Band C fine has a starting point of 150% of relevant weekly income and a range of 125 to 175% of relevant weekly income. Whereas a Band B fine has a starting point of 100% of relevant weekly income and a range of 75 to 125% of relevant weekly income.

The revised [guideline for speeding](#) is available on the Sentencing Council website.⁶³

6.3 Diversionary courses

In March 2016 the Transport Select Committee published a report into road traffic law enforcement. As part of this inquiry it looked at the issue of diversionary courses.

The Committee said that diversionary courses are the Government's preferred method for dealing with certain offences, while offering a place on a course in lieu of prosecution is at the discretion of the police. A course cannot be offered where an offender has already taken one in the previous three years. The use of these courses has grown rapidly since their introduction in 2004.⁶⁴

Several different courses are available through the [National Driver Offender Retraining Schemes \(NDORS\)](#). The most prominent of these is the National Speed Awareness Course (NSAC). In 2016 NSAC accounted for 1.19 million of the 1.39 million courses attended and completed under the NDORS banner. The number of courses delivered in 2016 was almost three times the number delivered in 2010.⁶⁵

The Transport Committee observed that police forces can decide which diversionary courses to offer and therefore not all courses are available in all areas. The same offence committed in different force areas can be dealt with in different ways.⁶⁶ Nobody is required to accept the offer of a course. They can always accept a fixed penalty, or contest the allegation in court.

The Committee went on to express concerns about how diversionary courses are funded. Diversionary courses are funded by a course fee paid by the offender. Some of this fee goes towards running the course,

⁶² Sentencing Council, [Magistrates' Court Sentencing Guidelines: Response to consultation](#), January 2017, pp15-16

⁶³ Further general information about the assessment of fines, fine bands and the definition of weekly income is given in the [explanatory materials section](#) of the revised MCSG

⁶⁴ Transport Committee, [Road traffic law enforcement](#) (Second Report of Session 2015–16), HC 518, 15 March 2016, paras 71-72

⁶⁵ Data from NDORS, [Trends and Statistics](#) [accessed 29 August 2017]

⁶⁶ Op cit., [Road traffic law enforcement](#), para 73

and some is held by the police to cover the cost of referring the offender to the course. These costs vary from one police force area to another. The Committee related the views of a number of witnesses that some police forces were profiting from the arrangements.⁶⁷

With this in mind, the Committee recommended that the costs for diversionary courses “should be standardised nationwide unless there is a clear and convincing reason not to do so, and that the Government consider legislating to ensure that this is the case, so that the public can be confident in the transparency of these courses”.⁶⁸

In its response to the Committee, published in May 2016, the Government made no comment on the fee proposal.⁶⁹ Further, in a debate on the Committee’s report in February 2017 the then Roads Minister, Andrew Jones, said that he had:

... some sympathy with drivers faced with a range of different costs for the same course, without any explanation for the variation. However, I can also see that the cost of delivery will vary from place to place. Where courses are delivered by an external provider, contractual commitments may need to be taken into account. For the time being, therefore, we do not intend to mandate a single national charge for each type of course.⁷⁰

In February 2017 the Government introduced to Parliament the [Vehicle Technology and Aviation Bill](#). Clause 23 of the Bill would insert new Part 3B (comprising new sections 90G to 90I) into the *Road Traffic Offenders Act 1988*.⁷¹ It provided a specific legal basis for charging for diversionary courses. The Government’s view was that road traffic offenders would not notice any difference as the same range of courses would be offered as before, on the same conditions, for the same fee. The change was a purely technical one, to remove any doubt as to the legal basis for charging. However, the Bill fell before the 2017 General Election and no similar provision has been introduced as yet in the 2017 Parliament.

6.4 Pre-empting the problem: limiting speed; raising awareness

Some argue that enforcement should not begin when an offence has been committed but that speed limits would be better ‘enforced’ by preventing vehicles from exceeding speed limits in the first place or at least by making drivers more aware of their speed as they drive. Intelligent Speed Adaptation (ISA) and speed limiters are two ways of achieving this goal.

ISA is “a system that provides, within the vehicle, information on the speed limit for the road currently being travelled on”:

Being mindful of the speed limit is also a theme of the Government’s long-standing [Think! road safety campaign](#)

⁶⁷ Ibid., para 76

⁶⁸ Ibid., para 80

⁶⁹ [Road traffic law enforcement: Government Response to the Committee’s Second Report of Session 2015–16](#) (First Special Report of Session 2016–17), HC 132, 27 May 2016

⁷⁰ [HC Deb 23 February 2017, cc493-4WH](#)

⁷¹ And equivalent provisions into the *Road Traffic Offenders (Northern Ireland) Order 1996* ([SI 1996/1320](#)), as amended

That information can be used to display the current speed limit inside the vehicle and warn the driver when he or she is speeding (i.e. Advisory ISA); it can be linked to the vehicle engine and perhaps brakes to curtail speed to the speed limit for the road while allowing the driver to override the system (i.e. Voluntary ISA); or it can be linked to engine and brakes without the possibility of an override (i.e. Mandatory or Non-Overridable ISA).⁷²

The Department for Transport published a study on ISA in 2008. This concluded that “successful implementation of ISA would ultimately rely upon the attitude of the general public”:

The current analysis found promising support for the finding that long-term experience with an ISA system increases acceptability. Despite an initial dip in acceptability, the rating of the ISA system in terms of usefulness and satisfaction, improved over time. Participants rated certain traffic environments, particularly those where it was easier to speed, as being more risky with ISA. Overtaking was also raised as a concern. Nevertheless, in the majority of driving situations, participants felt that risk was reduced when driving with ISA as compared to unsupported driving. Similarly participants believed that attention to the speed limits and to potential hazards (e.g. other road users, pedestrians) and conflicts had increased. Support for the implementation of ISA was also reasonably strong, with 56% of participants approving of compulsory fitting of ISA to all new vehicles. However, those expressing strong intentions to speed demonstrated the most resistance to ISA. This suggests that the voluntary implementation of ISA may fail to target those who are most in need of the system.

[...]

The analysis of future accidents using the favoured Base Combination of crash reduction models indicates that, over a 60-year period from 2010 to 2070, the Market Driven implementation scenario would be expected to reduce fatal accidents by 10% (approximately 15,400 fatal accidents), serious injury accidents by 6% (96,000 accidents), and slight injury accidents by 3% (336,000 accidents).⁷³

Transport for London (TfL) trialled ISA schemes in Southwark and Kensington & Chelsea in 2009.⁷⁴ The trial concluded that the voluntary ISA system was “conceptually well received, even though users have encountered various technical problems”:

Drivers, Driver Managers and Fleet Managers have a general optimism about using ISA and see a potential positive role for it within councils and as more broadly across all cars in London (possibly backed by legislation).

While many of the negative preconceptions that respondents talked about in previous research were borne out they did not prove to be gross negatives (i.e. speeding for safety is not commonly a problem that is encountered).

There is an initial period where a driver must adapt to being governed to the speed limits but after learning the quirks of the

⁷² DfT, [Intelligent Speed Adaptation \(ISA\)](#) [archived 3 May 2011]

⁷³ University of Leeds and MIRA Ltd for the DfT, [isa-UK intelligent speed adaptation: Executive Summary of Project Results](#), June 2008 pp31-32; [full report here](#)

⁷⁴ TfL press notice, [“TfL announces trial of Intelligent Speed Adaptation”](#), 11 May 2009

system, drivers feel quite comfortable about operating their vehicles. While the learning period is quite brief, there is a need for guidance and training to help them answer questions they have about the operation of an ISA vehicle.

In order to ensure that drivers are using the system and not taking advantage of the voluntary override (which would render the system redundant), monitoring the system should be made easy for managers who have limited time.

In addition, specific attention should be made to inform other drivers on the road about how the ISA system works and the council vehicles must be able to visually communicate to others on the road that council drivers are completely governed to the speed limit.

Training sessions and educational materials would greatly help to make drivers feel more confident and to reinforce the benefits and theory behind what the ISA system is meant to do which will help drivers become more engaged with the initiative. Since council workers are required to drive as part of their job, it will serve as motivating to know that they are helping out in some way rather than being punished, but ultimately they will participate if their job requires them to do so.⁷⁵

In August 2011 the Coalition Government published a paper setting out its national activities and projects regarding the four priority areas identified by the EU Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) Directive.⁷⁶ This included a project in Lancashire on ISA.⁷⁷ The Lancashire trial found that when drivers chose to use advisory ISA, speeding was reduced by 30% on 30 mph roads and by 56% on 70 mph roads and that overall, being able to use the system (but not necessarily having it active) reduced speeding on 30 mph roads by 18% and on 70 mph roads by 31%.⁷⁸

In its most recent report on the implementation of the Directive in the UK, published in August 2014, the Department for Transport made no mention of ISA.⁷⁹ This has not been raised in Parliament since 2013.

Speed limiters physically limit the maximum speed of a vehicle (like mandatory or non-overridable ISA). Speed limiters are required on goods vehicles and there has been discussion over the years about fitting similar devices to motorcycles.⁸⁰ Successive governments have generally opposed this type of technology. Indeed, the UK was strongly opposed to and voted against the introduction of the EU Directive which requires limiters to be fitted to all goods vehicles with a maximum mass exceeding 3.5 tonnes and passenger carrying vehicles with more

⁷⁵ TfL, [Intelligent Speed Adaption - Drivers' experiences](#), 09028b, December 2009, executive summary

⁷⁶ [Directive 2010/40/EU](#) (the 'ITS Directive') provides a framework under which the European Commission (EC) has to adopt specifications (i.e. functional, technical, organisational or services provisions) to address the compatibility, interoperability and continuity of ITS solutions across the EU

⁷⁷ DfT, [Intelligent Transport Systems in the United Kingdom: Initial Report](#), August 2011, pp38-39

⁷⁸ ITS Leeds, [Lancashire ISA Final Report: The effect of Advisory ISA on drivers' choice of speed and attitudes to speeding](#), January 2012, pvi

⁷⁹ DfT, [Intelligent Transport Systems in the UK: Progress Report](#), August 2014

⁸⁰ See, e.g.: [Government's response to the Committee's fifth report of 2006-07](#) (eighth special report of session 2006-07), HC 698, 19 June 2007, pp2-3

than eight seats.⁸¹ The Transport Minister, Jesse Norman, recently said that “The Government has no current plans to change the speed limiter requirements ... for heavy goods vehicles”.⁸²

When asked about extending requirements for speed limiters to other vehicles in June 2010, the then Transport Minister, Mike Penning, said:

Speed limiters are already required on all goods vehicles of over 3.5 tonnes maximum gross weight in the interests of road safety and environmental protection. If there were to be any proposal for limiters to be required on lighter goods vehicles we would want to review the supporting evidence from the EU on costs and benefits carefully before determining what the UK response would be.⁸³

⁸¹ See, e.g. DfT, [State of play on amended proposals](#), 22 August 2002; the Regulatory Impact Assessment for the implementation of this Directive, published in 2006, was also not particularly positive, see: DfT, [EC requirements to fit speed limiters: RIA](#), 27 January 2006

⁸² [Large Goods Vehicles: Speed Limits: Written question – 7152](#), 11 September 2017

⁸³ [HC Deb 3 June 2010, cc71-72W](#)

7. Government policy, 1997-

7.1 Labour Government, 1997-2010

Before it left office in May 2010 the evidence from the Labour Government's policy documents and consultations was that it intended to change its guidance to local authorities to ensure wider use of 20 mph limits in urban areas and lower limits in rural areas. However, no change was made before the 2010 General Election and Labour's manifesto for that election made no comment on the issue.⁸⁴

In its 1998 transport White Paper, the Labour Government announced a review to "develop a speed policy that takes account of the contribution of reduced speeds to environmental and social objectives as well as to road safety".⁸⁵ The review was launched in October 1998 and, amongst other things, it looked at how speed management could mitigate the adverse effects of traffic on the environment and on the general quality of people's lives.⁸⁶ In March 2000 the Government published its road safety strategy to 2010 and a separate review of speed management.⁸⁷ In its road safety document the government stated that its speed management strategy was to:

- publicise widely the risks of speed and the reasons for limits;
- develop a national framework for determining appropriate vehicle speeds on all roads, and ensuring that measures are available to achieve them;
- research a number of speed management problems to gain the necessary information to develop and test new policies; and
- take into account environmental, economic and social effects of policies when assessing their ability to reduce casualties.⁸⁸

Two reviews of the strategy were published in 2004 and 2007.⁸⁹

In April 2009 the Labour Government published a consultation on its future road strategy for 2010-2020.⁹⁰ Amongst other things, the consultation proposed changes to the guidance on 20 mph limits and limits on rural roads. Labour had always been generally in favour of

⁸⁴ Labour Party, *A Future fair for All: the Labour Party Manifesto 2010*, April 2010, p1.8

⁸⁵ DETR, *A new deal for transport: better for everyone*, Cm 3950, July 1998, paras 3.228

⁸⁶ DETR press notice, "Whitty launches national speed policy review", 23 October 1998

⁸⁷ DETR, *Tomorrow's roads: safer for everyone*, March 2000; and op cit., *New directions in speed management: a review of policy*, TRL also published a report on the effects of drivers' speed on road accident frequency, which showed that in a given set of road and traffic conditions, the frequency of accidents increases with the speed of traffic, see: TRL, *The effects of drivers' speed on the frequency of road accidents* (TRL report 421), 2000 – this report was not without its critics, see, for example [this article from Safe Speed](#), August 2004

⁸⁸ op cit., *Tomorrow's roads: safer for everyone*, para 6.3

⁸⁹ DfT, *Tomorrow's Roads – safer for everyone: The first three-year review*, April 2004; and: DfT, *Tomorrow's Roads – safer for everyone: The second three-year review*, February 2007

⁹⁰ DfT, *A safer way: consultation on making Britain's roads the safest in the world*, 21 April 2009

introducing lower speed limits in urban areas, particularly outside schools.⁹¹ However, the 2009 consultation represented a change of emphasis, moving to 20 mph as the standard speed limit on residential streets:

In order to improve safety on the streets where we live, we will amend our guidance on speed limits, recommending that highway authorities, over time, introduce 20 mph zones or limits into streets that are primarily residential in nature and which are not part of any major through route. Similarly, we will encourage local authorities to consider introducing 20 mph limits or zones in town or city streets, such as around schools, shops, markets, playgrounds and other areas where pedestrian and cyclist movements are high.⁹²

Similarly, on rural roads the Labour Government had long acknowledged a problem with 'inappropriate speed' in rural areas.⁹³ The 2009 consultation included an announcement that local highway authorities would be encouraged to look at whether speeds should be reduced on 'risky' rural roads. In effect, this would mean cutting the speed limit on any roads thus identified from 60 mph to 50 mph.⁹⁴

7.2 Conservative-led governments, 2010-

The Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government that took office in May 2010 made no mention of speed limits in the Coalition Agreement.⁹⁵ Its general policy was set out in the May 2011 *Strategic Framework for Road Safety*. This stated that it was "important to consider the impacts of road safety measures on the economy, the environment and communities. Speed limits can have impacts on each of these". It continued:

Local authorities are able to use their power to introduce 20 mph speed limit zones where (a) major streets where business on foot is more important than slowing down road traffic and (b) lesser residential roads in cities, towns and villages, particularly where this would be reasonable for the road environment, there is community support and streets are being used by pedestrians and cyclists. The evidence suggests that in residential streets, and in town centres where there is likely to be a conflict between vehicles and pedestrians, carefully implemented 20 mph zones can contribute to an improvement in road safety.

We plan to revise and reissue the guidance on speed limits in urban areas with the aim of increasing flexibility for local authorities. We will provide an economic tool to help them to assess the full costs and benefits of any proposed schemes. We expect this toolkit to help local authorities to make robustly defensible decisions about local speeds.⁹⁶

⁹¹ See, e.g. op cit., [New directions in speed management: a review of policy](#), paras 6.26 and 6.28 and DfT, [Child road safety strategy](#), February 2007, para 176

⁹² op cit., [A safer way: consultation on making Britain's roads the safest in the world](#), paras 5.19-5.23

⁹³ See, e.g.: [SC Deb \(D\) 11 March 2003, cc595-606](#)

⁹⁴ Op cit., [A safer way: consultation on making Britain's roads the safest in the world](#), paras 5.29-5.30

⁹⁵ HMG, [The Coalition: Our Programme for Government](#), May 2010; for an early statement of policy, see [HC Deb 15 July 2010, c832W](#)

⁹⁶ DfT, [Strategic Framework for Road Safety](#), 11 May 2011, para 3.26

The Government's most recent policy paper on road safety, the December 2015 *Road Safety Statement*, made very little mention of speed limits and contained no policy actions. It said only that "Local authorities will continue to be empowered to set appropriate speed restrictions for their local areas, including 20 mile per hour zones and limits".⁹⁷

As set out above, in the 2010 Parliament the Government published new guidance on setting speed limits, along with a speed limit appraisal tool. There are calls for and campaigns to reduce residential speeds and increase the motorway speed limit. Recent Government actions in these areas are described in sections 3, 4 and 5, above.

⁹⁷ DfT, [*Working Together to Build a Safer Road System British Road Safety Statement*](#), Cm 9175, 21 December 2015, para 3.15

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