



Roads: 30 mph repeater signs

Standard Note: SN1921
Last updated: 11 March 2014
Author: Louise Butcher
Section: Business and Transport

This note explains the law regarding the use of 30 mph repeater signs in urban areas.

30 mph repeater signs are not permitted on restricted roads; these are roads where there are street lights not more than 200 yards apart. The rules as to the use of repeater signs on roads with other speed limits were relaxed in 2012.

Information on other roads-related issues can be found on the [Roads Topical Page](#) of the Parliament website.

Contents

1	Restricted roads	1
2	Rules initially set out in the 2003 Regulations	2
3	Rules as amended in January 2012	3

1 Restricted roads

The present legislation as to the legal maximum speed limits is contained in sections 81 to 88 of the [Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984](#), as amended. 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. 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.

This information is provided to Members of Parliament in support of their parliamentary duties and is not intended to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual. It should not be relied upon as being up to date; the law or policies may have changed since it was last updated; and it should not be relied upon as legal or professional advice or as a substitute for it. A suitably qualified professional should be consulted if specific advice or information is required.

This information is provided subject to [our general terms and conditions](#) which are available online or may be provided on request in hard copy. Authors are available to discuss the content of this briefing with Members and their staff, but not with the general public.

2 Rules initially set out in the 2003 Regulations

Local authorities may not use 30 mph signs in built up areas. The general rule is that motorists are supposed to be aware that they are in a 30 mph area because the street lamps are 200 yards apart and the area is built-up. The general prohibition was “the result of case law which makes it difficult to gain convictions for speeding if some restricted roads and not others have repeater signs”.¹

The Labour Government did briefly consider allowing the use of 30 mph repeater signs but subsequently decided against it.

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”.² 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.³ In March 2000 the Government published its road safety strategy to 2010 and a separate review of speed management.⁴ The review found that there was a case for permitting repeater signs on roads which looked as though they might have a higher than 30 mph speed limit.⁵

The general prohibition did attract some criticism. For example, in evidence to the Transport Select Committee for a 2002 inquiry the Automobile Association argued that the link between the 30 mph limit and streetlights should end as it was not understood by most drivers and it could be confusing to many in understanding what the current speed limit was. The AA also argued that repeater signs should be permitted where it was not obvious that the speed limit was 30 mph.⁶ The Committee agreed.⁷ The Committee's report was debated in the House, where the 30 mph repeater sign issue was raised by the Opposition; the Government maintained that it would be impractical for some local authorities to use 30 mph repeater signs and others not as it would create unnecessary confusion.⁸

The Labour Government modified the general prohibition in the *Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions* (SI 2002/3113), which came into force in January 2003.

The new edition of the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions was issued in 2002 following consultation. The consultation indicated the change compared to the then 1994 Regulations and Directions:

Direction 11 is the former direction 10, but has been revised to correct an anomaly relating to 30mph repeater signs. The wording of the current regulations means that whilst 30mph repeaters are prohibited on a Restricted Road because of legal problems, if a local authority mistakenly applied a 30mph speed limit order to the same

¹ [HC Deb 23 October 2001, c193W](#)

² DETR, *A new deal for transport: better for everyone*, Cm 3950, July 1998, paras 3.228

³ DETR press notice, “Whitty launches national speed policy review”, 23 October 1998

⁴ DETR, *Tomorrow's roads: safer for everyone*, March 2000; and: DETR, *New directions in speed management: a review of policy*, March 2000

⁵ *ibid.*, *New directions in speed management: a review of policy*, paras 129-134

⁶ TLR Committee, *Road traffic speed* (ninth report of session 2001-02), HC 557, 13 June 2002, Ev 221

⁷ *ibid.*, para 79

⁸ [HC Deb 17 October 2002, cc151 and 186WH](#)

road repeaters would be mandatory. The revised direction prohibits repeaters on any of these roads with a 30mph speed limit in force.⁹

Direction 11 mandated that signs should be placed 'at regular intervals' along any road that was not a 30 mph road. The phrase 'at regular intervals' was not defined in the Regulations, but the Department of Transport (as it then was) published guidance on speed limit signs in 1995 which included a table showing the recommended distances between consecutive repeater signs and between the first/last repeater signs and the start/end of a speed limit. Different recommendations applied according to the type of road.¹⁰

3 Rules as amended in January 2012

The *Traffic Signs (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations and General Directions 2011* ([SI 2011/3041](#)) was the most significant revision of the 2003 regulations since their inception. It made some changes to the rules on repeater signs.

The previous Labour Government issued a consultation in September 2009. The changes proposed to Direction 11 were as follows:

This amendment relates to the use of repeater signs along the length of a prohibition. It includes new signs shown in diagrams 660.8 (car club permit holder parking), 660.9 (charging of electric vehicles), 959A (solo motorcycles in with-flow bus lanes) and diagram 960.2 (contra-flow cycling) and the omission of 637.2 (waiting prohibition in a pedestrian zone). The changes to the requirements for repeater signs retain the need to give adequate information to road users while eliminating unnecessary proliferation, by allowing them to be left out on defined short lengths of road. A new paragraph 2B is proposed in order to confirm that signs shown in diagrams 660 and 660.3 (repeater signs for permit holder parking) may be omitted within a permit parking area.

- Repeater signs for national speed limits (diagram 671) need not be placed along defined short lengths of carriageway.
- Additional repeater signs placed to serve traffic entering from a side road will not be deemed to compromise the 'regular intervals' at which the other repeaters are placed.
- Repeater signs in pedestrian zones and restricted zones may be placed at irregular intervals along a road, as required to inform drivers.¹¹

Consequently, the 2003 regulations, as amended, no longer include a requirement for repeater signs to be placed at regular intervals on short lengths of road. Direction 11(1) lists the signs to which the rest of the Direction applies. Direction 11(2) requires that 'at least one' of each of the signs to which it applies shall be placed "along a road which is subject to a restriction, requirement, prohibition or speed limit which can be indicated by the sign" and in the case of certain specified signs to face each stream of traffic to which the sign is intended to convey that restriction, requirement, prohibition or speed limit.

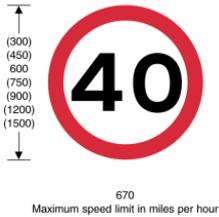
There are nine specific exemptions to this general requirement (Directions 11(2A) to (4)), which allow local highway authorities not to provide these signs in certain circumstances, the

⁹ DfT, *Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions (TSRGD) 1994 – letter*, August 2001, 'changes to directions'

¹⁰ DfT, *Speed limit signs – a guide to good practice* (Traffic Advisory Leaflet TAL 1/95), March 1995

¹¹ DfT, *Consultation document on the Traffic Signs (Amendment) Regulations and General Directions 2010 and the Traffic Signs (Temporary Obstruction) Regulations 2010*, September 2009, pp18-19

intention being to reduce street clutter. This includes exemption 11(2E), which refers to general speed limit signs (diagram 670):



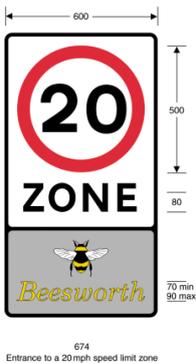
This states that the sign referred to in diagram 670 need not be placed in accordance with Direction 11(2) along a length of road which is subject to the speed limit indicated by that sign if that length of road

- (a) is subject to a speed limit of 20 mph and is shorter than 200 metres;
- (b) is subject to a speed limit of 30 mph, is shorter than 200 metres and does not have a system of carriageway lighting furnished by lamps lit by electricity;
- (c) is subject to a speed limit of 40 mph and is shorter than 250 metres;
- (d) is subject to a speed limit of 50 mph and is shorter than 350 metres; or
- (e) is subject to a speed limit of 60 mph, is shorter than 400 metres and is a dual carriageway road or a motorway.

Exemption 11(3) further states, in relation to roads with a 20 mph speed limit, that the sign shown in diagram 670:

- (a) when varied to “20”, need not be placed in accordance with paragraph (2) on a road within an area into which each entrance for vehicular traffic has been indicated by the sign shown in diagram 674; and
- (b) when displayed on a variable message sign, need not be placed in accordance with paragraph (2) when the variable message sign is mounted on a gantry or other structure and is so placed that a traffic lane of the carriageway or an actively managed hard shoulder passes directly beneath it.]

This is diagram 674:



Exemption 11(4) further states provides that the sign shown in diagram 670 (except when displayed on a variable message sign) shall not be placed along:

(a) a road on which there is provided a system of carriageway lighting furnished by lamps lit by electricity placed not more than 183 metres apart in England and Wales or not more than 185 metres apart in Scotland and which is subject to a speed limit of 30 mph; or

(b) a [road] on which a national speed limit is in force.

The Government views this as a liberalising measure, combined with other changes relating to signage for 20 mph zones (and out of the scope of this note). For further details see paragraphs 89-101 of [Department for Transport Circular 01/2013](#) on setting local speed limits.