



PARLIAMENTARY ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR TRANSPORT SAFETY

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20MPH DEFAULT SPEED LIMIT BRIEFING – JOHN LEECH MP

Pedestrians and cyclists are over-represented in the road death and injury statistics and are most frequently injured on urban roads. Increasing the ability to implement and enforce 20mph zones through time over distance cameras will have benefits for reducing the numbers of vulnerable road users killed and injured each year in urban residential and shopping streets.

Time over distance cameras

One of the most effective ways of implementing and enforcing 20mph zones is through traffic calming such as road humps, chicanes and other environmental treatments as speed cameras are currently only approved to be used at 30mph and above. Unfortunately, road humps can be very unpopular with both drivers and residents as they are often unsightly, can cause problems with on-street parking and can lead to inappropriate driving behaviour such as sudden acceleration and braking.

Time over distance cameras offer an alternative enforcement tool. They operate by monitoring time of entry into and exit from a zone and comparing the expected travel time if all speed limits are adhered to. This allows longer stretches of road to have limits enforced than would be possible with a fixed site camera. They are also considered to be fairer, as they monitor speed over a longer distance and so avoid the complaints of ‘penalising drivers for momentary errors’, which are frequently made about fixed site cameras. Transport for London gave evidence to the Transport Select Committee’s road policing and technology inquiry that time over distance cameras would enable it to implement and enforce 20mph zones on 10,000km of residential road within 10 years – rather than the 35 years it would take to traffic calm them.

Many local authorities, and TfL in particular, are keen to explore the possibilities of using time over distance cameras. Transport for London has been operating a trial site and initial results show zero casualties since its introduction. However, to ensure the equipment is suitable and reliable enough to be used in prosecutions it must be “type approved” by the Home Office. This is an important, though lengthy process. The Transport Select Committee comments on the delays in type approval in its recent report, *Roads policing and technology: getting the balance right*, suggesting improvements to accelerate the process without compromising the integrity of the outcome. Time over distance cameras are awaiting type approval and the Government, in its response to the Select Committee’s report, did not indicate a date by which that might be completed. Early type approval of time over distance cameras is a necessary precursor to wider roll out of 20mph zones.

Public opinion on speed

The debate about the means to both manage speed and enforce speed compliance remains a heated one. However, there is a high level of support for enforcing speed limits.

According to a recently published Audit Commission report, [*Changing Lanes: evolving roles in road safety*](#), a survey conducted for the Commission showed that “around one fifth of people identified speed and the volume of traffic among the issues that most need tackling, to improve the quality of life for residents. The British Social Attitudes Survey suggested that around three quarters of people support 20mph speed restrictions in residential areas, including 72 per cent of drivers questioned. However, only 43 per cent of drivers favour speed bumps, which can be necessary to enforce this popular, low speed limit”.

In addition, the Social Attitudes to Road Traffic Risk in Europe (SARTRE) project surveys the opinions of representative samples of 1000 drivers in each of 23 countries across Europe. The most recent third report from the project was published in 2004, offering a reliable indication of driver attitude across Europe and can, in a number of countries, be compared with the previous two SARTRE studies.

In terms of the views of UK drivers about speed, the key conclusions were:

- 87% see "driving too fast" as a cause of accidents
- 68% support the fitment of speed limiters
- 75% support the fitment of black box data recorders to help investigate accidents
- 38% have an expectation of being monitored for speed and
- 78% support the use of cameras for speed enforcement

In all of these cases, UK support for measures is higher than the European average. It is also interesting to note that, when asked the question "Have you been caught for speeding in the last three years?", only 9% of UK drivers answered in the affirmative. This was lower than the European average, suggesting that, despite the criticism of enforcement in the media, UK drivers are more likely to obey the law than their counterparts in the rest of Europe.

Compliance with speed limits

Within the UK there is evidence of a shift in mood towards speeding as there has been increased compliance amongst car drivers with the 30mph limit. The annual *Vehicle Speeds in Great Britain* survey shows that the failure to comply with the 30mph limit has fallen consistently since 1996, from 72% to 50% in 2005. The overall conclusion to be drawn from both these findings and the SARTRE studies is that there is considerable support for road safety measures to change behaviour among drivers in urban areas where vulnerable road users are most at risk upon which the Government must build.

Graduated speeding penalties

To ensure speeding continues to be viewed as a serious issue, it is important there is no downgrading of penalties for speeding on restricted roads. The Road Safety Act introduced the concept of graduated fixed penalty points, so that factors such as location or time of day into account and allow for the seriousness of the offence and the severity of consequences to be considered when issuing penalties. Section 17 introduces a graduated scale of penalties for speeding – between 2 and 6 points.

The Government has indicated that it will begin a consultation process to examine changing specific fixed penalties. PACTS supports the concept of graduated penalties, but is keen to reinforce the importance of retaining the 3 point minimum penalty for speeding on restricted roads because they are often mixed areas of shops and houses, where extra care is needed because there is a lot of interaction between vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists. No date or terms of reference for the consultation have yet been announced.