

Mike Penning MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
76 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DR

21 April 2011

Dear Mr Penning

Clarification for local authorities on setting local speed limits

We are writing to urge you to use the opportunity of the forthcoming strategic framework for road safety to make it easier for local authorities to implement 20mph limits.

The publication of the strategic framework is an opportunity to set out clarifications that would remove perception barriers commonly faced by authorities wishing to implement 20mph limits, particularly on a village, town or city wide basis.

When a local authority and community have made the decision to implement a 20mph speed limit they are often hindered by the perception that they do not have the necessary powers, while this is not in fact the case. A strong statement of clarification to ensure that local authorities are fully aware that they have the power to implement 20mph limits, particularly on a village, town or city wide basis across all types of road (with higher speed limits being justified on a case by case basis), without the need for onerous physical infrastructure, and recognising the potential benefits on roads where previously mean speeds were above 24mph, as indicated in the Portsmouth trial, would be very welcome.

A statement of clarification in this way would make a valuable contribution to the Government's work to reduce road casualties and promote healthier, more sustainable lifestyles. It would also be in line with the Government's commitment to localism, in enabling local authorities to more effectively respond to the demands of their community.

Alongside this it would be useful to see some minor changes in the guidance that address the need for extensive repeater signs around 20mph limits and costly physical infrastructure around 20mph zones. Numerous academic studies show the wide benefits of 20mph limits for local residents and drivers, including reduced road casualties. The introduction of comprehensive 20mph coverage in Hull and Portsmouth led to significant casualty reductions, particularly among vulnerable road users, and was shown to be both cost-effective and well-received by residents.

Increasing use of 20mph limits in urban areas is also recommended by health advisers, such as NICE in their complementary guidance on road design and modification, as an important way to prevent injuries and promote healthier lifestyles. While many local authorities are already choosing to implement town and city wide 20mph limits based on community demand, and the road safety, health and environmental benefits, strong ministerial clarification would enable more authorities to deliver this highly beneficial work.

Finally we believe your Department has a vital role in monitoring and sharing the effects of 20mph speed limits to enable local authorities to develop best practice and understand what schemes are underway around the country. We would urge you to establish a national database of local authority initiatives and accompanying evaluation to develop this role.

We look forward to your response and would be very happy to meet you to discuss this issue in more detail. If your office would like to arrange this please contact Richard Mullis at Living Streets on 020 7377 4909.

Yours sincerely

Tony Armstrong
Chief Executive
Living Streets

On behalf of the following signatories:

Frank Atherton
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CC: Norman Baker MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport