



PACTS WRITTEN COMMENTS ON THE REVISION OF DFT'S SPEED  
LIMIT CIRCULAR

Friday 5<sup>th</sup> February 2010

The Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety (PACTS) is a registered charity and an associate Parliamentary Group. Its charitable objective is "**To protect human life through the promotion of transport safety for the public benefit**". Its aim is to advise and inform members of the House of Commons and of the House of Lords on air, rail and road safety issues.

PACTS broadly welcomes the principles outlined in the revision of the DfT's Speed Limit Circular 01/2006. Granting wider flexibility to Local Authorities on speed limits and zones will present an opportunity for more appropriate, contextually-relevant decisions to be made about Local Authority roads.

The points below outline general and specific responses to the review. Where topics are raised in the [GENERAL COMMENTS](#) section they can be assumed as applicable to both the [20 MPH ZONES AND LIMITS](#) and [RURAL SPEEDS LIMITS](#) sections.

## GENERAL COMMENTS

### The Role of Central Government

It is appropriate that Local Authorities are given greater flexibility when considering speed limits and zones on their roads, and that this move will undoubtedly allow speed limits and zones to be more closely linked with local knowledge about particular conditions of roads. Given the clear role which the DfT plays in research and statistical analysis, it is essential that in passing these responsibilities to Local Authorities the Department compiles an accurate database of all speed limits and zones, nationally.

Higher tier routes on the rural network often pass through a number of Local Authorities. Alternating conditions and speed limits on such through routes may confuse, distract and increase the risk profile to road users. DfT should therefore assist Local Authorities in their coordination of speed limit reviews and alterations and route treatments to ensure that consistency is guaranteed. The importance of whole route treatment is perhaps most evident when looking across country borders. A number of routes crossing between the Netherlands and Belgium, for example, observe a change in safety risk across the border as a result of (among other things) environmental differences between the two sides.<sup>1</sup>

### Evidence and Research

The evidence on 20mph zones is clear, and indicates positive reductions in speeds and injury collisions. Evidence on 20mph limits suggests positive results in certain contexts. It is important that trials being conducted and any alterations to speed limits are monitored and data is fed back to central government for detailed analysis of speeds, safety risk, casualty rates, levels of walking and cycling and other public health statistics.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://eurorap2009.s3.amazonaws.com/20091201\\_paneuromappress.pdf](http://eurorap2009.s3.amazonaws.com/20091201_paneuromappress.pdf)

## Continuous Review

Local Authorities should be encouraged to keep all speed limits under some form of permanent review to ensure that they continue to be relevant based on use and function, both actual and desired, of the roads or streets in question.

## The Self Explaining Road

It is important that alterations to speed limits and zones are backed up with the appropriate signals to road users and the desired function of the road or street is clear.

The table below can be used to determine the kinds of road user behaviours which may be identified at the various levels of road hierarchy. At the 'above 50kph' level, the behaviours required are quite specific, regimented and uniform. The road environment should accordingly be regulated and predictable.

	Social behaviour	Social traffic behaviour	Technical cum legal traffic behaviour
Characteristics of behaviour	Miscellaneous and pluralistic	Miscellaneous	Uniform
Movement mode	Unfocused	Largely focused	Extremely focused
Appropriate speed	< 50 kph	< 50 kph	> 50 kph
Predictability of behaviour	Largely unpredictable	Limited predictability	Largely predictable
Eye contact	Frequent	Limited	Minimal
Determinants of behaviour	Social environment (people) and physical environment	Social environment (people) and physical environment + laws, traffic rules	Control system - traffic engineering and legal system (infrastructure and traffic engineering environment, road markings and road signs)
Behaviour expected from other road users	Social behaviour	Social behaviour with legal and technical constraints	Technical and regulated traffic behaviour
Signals from spatial layout that are relevant to behaviour	Context of built and natural environment	Urban environment, design of public spaces, road design, and contextual references	Signals, traffic signs and lights, traffic lights, speed bumps, indications from authorities

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Research looking into the Dutch concept of the self-explaining road<sup>3</sup> should be considered by DfT, with funded trials determining the relevance and importance of road environment alterations alongside and independently of speed limit changes.

<sup>2</sup> Interreg IIIB Project (2005) 'Shared Space – Room for Everyone – A New Vision for Public Spaces' p16

<sup>3</sup> [http://euroris.swov.nl/knowledge/content/15\\_road/self\\_explaining\\_roads.htm](http://euroris.swov.nl/knowledge/content/15_road/self_explaining_roads.htm)

## ON 20 MPH ZONES AND LIMITS

### Alterations to Appendix A

The proposed wording is broadly suitable, although in certain areas, the principle of the review is undermined by insufficient options for Local Authorities to review the way in which 20mph zones and limits are considered.

PACTS proposes an alteration to the wording of the suggested text in Appendix A so that Page 4, para 4-6 reads:

Based on this positive effect on road safety, and a generally favourable reception from local residents, we want to encourage highway authorities, over time, to introduce 20 mph zones or limits into

- Streets which are primarily residential in nature; and into
- Town or city streets where pedestrian and cyclist movements are high, such as around schools, shops, markets, playgrounds and other areas; and
- Those through traffic routes where speeds below 20 mph are required to reconcile traffic movement with other functions of the route concerned.

Successful 20 mph zones and 20 mph speed limits should be generally self-enforcing, i.e. the existing conditions of the road together with any measures such as traffic calming or signing as part of the scheme, should lead to average traffic speeds 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.

Local authorities should keep speed limits under review to ensure that limits and zones reflect any change in circumstances.

The proposed wording should allow for Local Authorities which wish to change the function of a road – this is particularly relevant in the Mixed Priority Route Scenario.

### Evidence and Research

The review refers to the Portsmouth trial of signed-only area-wide 20mph limits. Whilst the early data from Portsmouth is promising and we hope to see a sustainable reduction in speeds, it is important that the uniqueness of location is observed. All Local Authorities will have different elements affecting the viability of area-wide 20mph limits and the techniques with which they should be achieved. This review should allow for more flexibility of 20mph based on a case by case basis, it should not encourage all Local Authorities to sign area-wide 20mph limits without reason.

## ON RURAL SPEED LIMITS

### Evidence and research

The PACTS Road Environment Working Party has spent some time looking into three of the four Rural Road Safety Projects. The DfT may want to put-off alterations in rural speed limit changes until data from these projects has been analysed over at least three years. Furthermore, funded trials (as outlined above) determining the relevance and importance of road environment alterations alongside and independently of speed limit changes should be considered within a rural context.

It will also be important to undertake a detailed evaluation of the whole route treatments initiated by a number of Local Authorities. These have shown the need for a coordinated approach to speed management based on a continuation of signage, engineering and enforcement.

For more information on any of the issues raised in this response, please contact

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