# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **TITLE**  | **20mph Early Speed Data** |
| **DATE**  | **20 February 2024** |
| **BY** | **Lee Waters MS, Deputy Minister for Climate Change** |

In September 2023, we introduced a 20mph default speed limit in built-up areas of Wales.

The aim was clear: reduce the speed of vehicles and reduce deaths and severe injuries on our roads. Lower speeds will, in turn, create safer, better communities to live, work and lead our lives.

Preliminary national speed data published today (20 February 2024) is encouraging. It shows weighted mean speeds on a sample of main restricted roads in Wales reduced by an average of 4mph over the three months after the default speed limit was introduced.

This is what we expected. It’s in line with previous data and anecdotal reports of driver behaviour since the speed limit changed. And as the Task Force Group report said in 2020:

“There is overwhelming evidence that lower speeds result in fewer collisions and a reduced severity of injuries; and consistent evidence that casualties are reduced when 20mph limits are introduced. It should be noted that these benefits are achieved even when average speeds do not drop to 20mph - any speed reduction leads to a positive outcome. Speed reductions are expected to increase over time as people become accustomed to the lower limits and slower driving is normalised.”

The monitoring, delivered by Transport for Wales involved nine different types of communities across Wales.

The “weighted mean” speeds (that is, the average speeds when differences for traffic volumes are taken into account) on main roads were 28.9mph before the new default speed limit, compared to 24.8mph post roll-out of the legislation. So, more people in Wales are now driving at safer speeds.

Feedback from Operation Ugain, the police led motorist engagement campaign, also published this month, shows that most vehicles are driving below the current enforcement threshold.

As part of the operation, 270 drivers were directly engaged by the Fire and Rescue Service. Just two drivers out of 10,000 monitored were prosecuted – demonstrating that we are taking an engagement led approach to implementing this major change.

We are also publishing the final monitoring report from the first areas that implemented 20mph, prior to the national roll-out. This data shows that 65% of vehicles monitored were travelling 24mph or under, compared to 50% prior to introduction of 20mph. Those traveling at the highest speeds also reduced by an average of 3mph.

This is encouraging evidence that, over time, we will see the wider behaviour change that the default 20mph policy is seeking to achieve – slower speeds in areas where people and vehicles mix, to keep everyone safe.

As a result, we can expect fewer collisions, fewer deaths and fewer severe injuries. Reducing harm and reducing the impact on the NHS and other emergency services.

There is international evidence of strong links between lowering speeds and decreasing the number of collisions and people killed or injured from them. For example, research undertaken by the Transport Research Laboratory in 2000 shows that for urban roads with low average speeds, there is an average 6% reduction in collisions with each 1mph reduction in average speed.

Pedestrians are around five times more likely to be killed when hit by a vehicle travelling at 30mph than a vehicle travelling at 20mph.

In the distance it takes for a car travelling 20mph to stop, a car travelling 30mph would still be moving at 24mph. This makes a substantial difference in terms of avoiding collisions.

People have told us that the speed of vehicles is also one of the main reasons why they do not walk or cycle more or let their children do so. Lowering speeds in our built-up communities, can therefore contribute to better and safer environments for active travel, which in turn has significant public health benefits.

We acknowledge the move to default 20mph in built-up areas of Wales is a significant change. We are assessing the impact on an ongoing basis.

We have consistently said that, despite the best efforts of our hard-working highway authorities, the scale of the challenge in delivering this change meant we wouldn’t get the speed limit on every single restricted road in Wales right first time.

People who feel 20mph has been wrongly applied to a particular road should let their local council or highway authority know.

There appear to have been some inconsistences in the ways highway authorities have applied our guidance to make exceptions – that is, to change the speed limit on some roads from the default 20mph back to 30mph.

We appointed a team of experts to review how the guidance on making exceptions has been applied and to suggest ways we could help highway authorities make changes.

Today, the team have published their early finding and initial recommendations.

Key recommendations include: expanding and clarification of the exceptions guidance to help Highway Authorities take into account local context more fully and to provide a broader context of guidance on all speed limits in settlements, not just those subject to the default.

The Review Team also suggest training for highway authority officers should be developed to support them in interpreting and applying the guidance; and that legal advice should be sought on the potential liability of highway authorities when making exceptions to the default 20mph limit.

The Review Team will next gather a wide range of views on the exceptions guidance from Highway Authorities, stakeholder groups and representative bodies.