

Department for Transport
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5 October 2020

Dear Sir/Madam

ROADS POLICING REVIEW: CONSULTATION RESPONSE ON SPEEDING

The environmental disruption caused by a road system regime that still prioritises speed and vehicle movement is not in accord with today's wider environmental objectives. Local people have higher aspirations for their neighbourhoods to be both quieter and safer, and to meet the targets set by the Climate Emergency programme. That the government is committed to improving the present poor speeding situation is very much to be welcomed, and speed control will be the prime focus of this letter.

The consultation **'seeks to identify what makes a difference'** and how **'technology can assist in enforcing road traffic law now, and in the future'**.

It also aims to **'understand the value of enforcement in influencing road user behaviour, and the current enforcement capability'**.

A number of Councils have recently introduced Borough-wide 20 mph speed limits.

Whilst this is to be welcomed as part of a wider range of environmental protection measures, there are significant localised issues with speeding non-compliance. Action to encourage optimum driver behaviour is clearly needed.

The police say they are unable to devote resources to countering speeding.

And as an example, the London Borough of Merton's annual financial allocation from TfL has been dropped from £1.4 million to around £300k, which has resulted in a **"response and capacity to tackle speeding (being) severely limited in the foreseeable future"** (letter from the Council to the Society 9/20).

With the incidence of speeding growing by some 40% since 2011, relying on enforcement by financially strapped bodies will clearly completely fail to achieve results. The use of technology therefore may have a greater chance of success.

To give local Highway Authorities an understanding of the various options, controlled trials should be run with selected Councils. These should aim to clarify where and where not each approach works best, its cost, and public perceptions. Should the LB Merton be considered (if it wished to participate), then the Society would be happy to help. Examples of such measures could be:

- Encouragement of the wider use of the 'smiling face' signage, that informs drivers of their speed: this is comparatively cheap and is able to be relocated as required. However, its effect/usefulness is said to be limited: structured trials would be instructive.
- Use of automatic number plate recognition is already used (hospital car parks, the Dartford crossing etc). Should this technology be linked to the 'smiling face' approach? Should it be linked to retro-signage that provides a "helpful reminder"? Should there be escalation to written warnings etc for non-compliance? Obviously, this is the kind of issue that generates strong public views, but it would be useful to have a discussion based on a technical understanding, derived from real trials.
- Consideration could be given to introducing the 'red-ahead' traffic light system, which was very effective when used in Slough in c1980.

On a long road, with many crossings all controlled by lights, the 40mph limit was achieved by the (comparatively) simple sequencing of lights.

At the start of the sequence there was a simple roadside notice, that said in effect:

“Keep to 40 mph and you will always see the red light well ahead changing to green as you approach. If you exceed 40 than you will simply have to stop at the red light, so there is no point in exceeding 40”.

It worked well: not usable everywhere obviously, but ideal for some roads (e.g. Worple Road between Wimbledon and Raynes Park).

- Councils are introducing Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTN's), School Streets, low speed zones and pedestrianisation schemes, all of which require vehicle Satnav systems to be kept fully up to date. This seems not to be happening.

Should there not be a legal requirement for Councils to formally inform the Satnav firms when new speed limits and other measures are introduced, so that there can be in-vehicle indication of speed non-compliance?

Currently, without this information being embedded in the satnav technology base, the driver may be left unaware of the speed restriction. In-cab soundings are becoming more common.

The current trials around autonomous vehicles will presumably have to rely on such information being automatically available.

- If Local Councils are to properly manage their road systems and use far more sophisticated technological systems to deliver a higher standard of environmental quality for local people, they need independent funding. Currently, income from municipal parking is not fully ring-fenced, and surplus funding is being used for non-road based works. This should be re-thought, so that the fees charged are seen by the public to be used directly to benefit local road users (including pedestrians/cycles).

We have to recognise that for many vehicle drivers, the introduction of lower speed limits impacts on a lifetime of their (sometimes poor?) driving habits. Unsurprisingly it takes them time to adjust.

But the benefits in accident reduction, in noise and pollution and safety appear to be very significant. A point not often mentioned is the very real threat (mental as well as physical), as experienced by the pedestrian on the footway, of speeding traffic passing very close to them.

This feeling of high vulnerability is lessened, at least to some extent, when vehicle speed is lowered.

Cyclists are similarly in a very vulnerable position and feel threatened on a daily basis.

The Manual for Streets publication (DfT/DCLG 2007) thankfully utterly changed the previous out-dated thinking around how traffic and towns should interact. (Hopefully the 2020 update will cover speed).

Councils now see (perhaps too slowly?) an increase in the importance of the pedestrian environment.

Low traffic neighbourhoods (the successors to the 'environmental areas' in central London in the 1970's), pedestrianisation schemes, limiting and managing traffic rather than letting it take over the city, prioritising pedestrians and cycles over vehicles, are all welcome pointers.

Achieving Climate Emergency goals, in energy use, air pollution, accidents, noise, means that there is a need to push ahead with controlling speeds. And rather than relying on a crude "catch and punish" approach, could better technology encourage greater driver compliance?

So what should the next steps be? Local Councils acting alone will have neither the technical information nor the financial resources to deliver better speed compliance. It is therefore suggested that the DfT should (a) commission independent studies of the various technologies available, and (b) ring-fence all Council income from parking etc to ensure that resources for speed control are in place.

Yours faithfully,

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Chairman, Wimbledon Society Planning and Environment Committee

Copy: Chris Lee: LBMerton Director of Environmental Services