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Y Dirprwy Weinidog Newid Hinsawdd  
Deputy Minister for Climate Change



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1318  
Ein cyf/Our ref LW/00034/23

Jack Sargeant MS  
Chair - Petitions committee

1 February 2023

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter of 10 January in reference to a petition which seeks to Exempt A and B roads in Wales from the proposed blanket 20mph speed limit.

Whilst we appreciate the issues raised in the petition, the Welsh Government believes decreasing speeds reduces accidents and saves lives, and alongside this quality of life will improve, making room on our streets for safer active travel. This helps reduce our environmental impact and has a positive outcome for our physical and mental wellbeing.

On 12 July the Welsh Senedd approved the legislation to lower the default national speed limit on residential roads and busy pedestrian streets from 30mph to 20mph.

The new legislation will not apply a blanket speed limit on all roads, it will simply make the default limit 20mph on restricted roads (generally those roads with street lighting). Local highway authorities, who know their area best, can then apply the criteria in the [Exceptions Guidance](#) and engage with the local community to decide which roads should remain at 30mph.

The Exceptions guidance is intended for local interpretation by highway authorities to make evidence-based decisions on setting exceptions to the default speed limit of 20mph. It provides a methodology to ensure a consistent approach to exceptions across Wales is taken; yet allowing for local factors and circumstances to be taken into account.

Most exceptions are expected to be made on A and B classified roads these generally form the main routes carrying traffic through urban areas. Other roads typically carry mostly local traffic and serve only residential properties so it is expected that exceptions would therefore not normally be made for such roads.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

The following 'Place' criteria have been developed to guide highway authorities to determine, in a consistent way across Wales, which sections of roads may have significant demands for people walking and cycling:

1. Within a 100m walk of any educational setting (e.g. primary, secondary, further education and higher education)
2. Within 100m walk of any community centre
3. Within 100m walk of any hospital
4. Where the number of residential and/or retail premises fronting a road exceeds 20 properties per km.

Sections of road which meet any of these Place criteria should not be considered for exceptions. Highway authorities retain the flexibility to set local speed limits that are right for individual roads, reflecting local needs and considerations however, they should have a clear and reasoned case if they chose to not apply these criteria.

The Welsh Government is under no illusions that this is a huge behavioural change. This is why we are not rushing anything. Seven local authorities are currently taking part in the initial rollout of the 20mph settlement areas. The purpose of the phase 1 settlements is to use this as opportunity to learn lessons to shape the national rollout and to gather long term data.

Focussing on the issue raised in the petition regarding an increase in pollution as a result of the lower speed limit, there is a strong evidence base that 20mph will have no negative impacts on air quality, with small improvements observed in various studies across the UK. For example, the Petitions Committee may wish to view a recent assessment of [air pollution levels in Richmond upon Thames](#), following the implementation of a 20mph scheme in late 2019 and early 2020. This showed encouraging early signs that lower speed limits may contribute to lower pollution levels. An [explanatory memorandum](#) was also published in June 2022, when the Restricted Roads (20 mph Speed Limit) (Wales) Order 2022 was laid. Public health Advisors have similarly informed Welsh Government that 'scientific research has shown that lower speed limits can reduce pollution where there is smoother driving behaviour. Emissions of nitrogen oxides (NOx) are 2 to 4 times higher under hard acceleration than under constant speed; therefore, underlying that more acceleration, so to 30mph, will pollute more than accelerating to 20mph and then driving more steadily'. Finally, while not all of the available evidence suggests that 20mph limits decrease all forms of air pollution, it is generally accepted that they do not increase air pollution relative to 30mph limits (Archer et al, 2008; Journard et al, 1995; TEAG, 2013).

Turning to the issue raised regarding an increase in congestion as a result of the 20mph speed limit, journey times on roads in urban areas tend to be determined by junctions and signals, rather than the speed limit. In many cases lowering the speed limit to 20mph will have little or no impact on journey times. Where there is an impact, our analysis has showed us that most journeys would only be around one minute longer but this would make the roads safer for pedestrians and cyclists. You can find further information on our website at:

[Seven things you may not know about Wales' new 20mph default speed limit | GOV.WALES](#)

[Introducing 20mph speed limits | GOV.WALES](#)

[Introducing 20mph speed limits: frequently asked questions | GOV.WALES](#)

May I also refer Members of the Petitions Committee to our [Wales Transport Strategy](#). Climate Change is the greatest challenge we face and the Welsh Government and Senedd have committed to taking it seriously - making decisions that will not always be comfortable or easy, but are required for the future generations of Wales. The strategy has modal shift at its heart and changing the default speed limit from 30mph to 20mph will play an integral part. We are investing in active travel and are targeting 45 percent of all trips to occur by public transport, cycling or walking by 2040. This modal shift will in turn help reduce emissions by reducing the number of vehicles on the road especially those making shorter trips which could be made on foot or bike. As with any cultural change we know it takes time to win hearts and minds and inevitably we will face some challenge, but I am confident that if we all work together we can make the necessary changes that will benefit us now and in the future.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lee', written in a cursive style.

**Lee Waters AS/MS**

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