

20mph petitions

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 16 Medi 2024
Petitions Committee | 16 September 2024

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This briefing has been prepared to support the Committee's consideration of two petitions relating to 20mph default speed limits. All references to Cabinet titles/personnel were correct at the time of preparing this briefing (August 2024).

Petition 1

Petition Number: P-06-1432

Petition title: Hold a Wales-wide Public Poll to establish the true level of public support for the 20mph limit

Text of petition: Public opinion throughout both social and mainstream media now shows that the vast majority of the people of Wales are strongly against the new 20mph limit. Yet despite this, the Welsh Government insists it has the support of the majority. Official surveys to date are from very limited numbers in specific areas and can in no way be taken as representative of the feelings of the entire Welsh population.

Claimed support is now widely seen as nothing more than statistical manipulation.

The public now has no faith in these claims and in the interest of credibility the truth needs to be established.



In my view refusing to allow the people of Wales to voice their opinion on something that has such a massive impact on every aspect of their lives is undemocratic, authoritarian, and insultingly dismissive of the people. There has to be complete openness and honesty in the level of support this 20mph limit really has and this can only be achieved by giving all the people of Wales the opportunity to voice their opinions.

A Wales-wide Public Poll is the only democratic way to establish beyond doubt to both the Welsh Government and the population of Wales what the true level of support really is.

Petition 2

Petition Number: P-06-1438

Petition title: Start a public inquiry into to the reasons, justification and evidence for 20mph.

Text of petition: The reports and feedback from the public in general, since the introduction of the default speed limit, seem to contradict the justification given by Ministers. I believe it is an unnecessary expense to no proven benefit. Where is all the evidence, not selective facts. Where are the facts on the positive side of keeping the 30mph, specifically on the benefit to the economy.

1. Background

In 2019 the Welsh Government set up a task and finish group to consider whether 20mph should become the default speed limit in residential areas. In July 2020, the Welsh Government accepted the group's recommendations, including that the default speed limit on restricted roads should be reduced from 30mph to 20mph.

Following public consultation and a pilot scheme across eight communities, the Welsh Government laid the Restricted Roads (20 mph Speed Limit) (Wales) Order in June 2022. The draft Order was passed by the Senedd in July 2022 and came into force in September 2023.

The policy has received widespread media coverage and the petition calling for the legislation to be ‘rescinded’ has received over 469,000 signatures – the highest ever received for a Senedd petition.

Senedd Research has previously published a number of articles on:

- [the policy and reaction](#) to it in the lead up to national roll-out;
- the [implementation of the policy](#) and the effectiveness of 20mph speed limits;
- how the policy will be [enforced and monitored](#); and
- [developments since the policy came into force](#) (such as the [guidance review](#)) and early monitoring data.

The petitions under consideration relate to public opinion on the policy and to the evidence on the impact of 20mph speed limits.

Impact of 20mph speed limits elsewhere

Historically, evidence on the efficacy of 20mph speed limits has been mixed. A 2018 UK Government [report on the effectiveness of 20mph speed limits](#) found “insufficient evidence” that 20mph limits in residential areas made a “significant change” in collisions and accidents.

In contrast, [a 2018 review of evidence](#) commissioned by the Welsh Government found “moderate to strong” evidence that 20mph limits reduce casualties. The review also considered evidence on other factors including active travel and air pollution.

Part of the challenge in assessing the impact arises from differing approaches to implementing 20mph. Speed limited areas vary in size, and [there’s a distinction between](#) self-enforcing 20mph limits without traffic calming measures, and traffic calmed 20mph zones.

Belfast, often cited as an example of 20mph limits, saw 76 city centre streets move to 20mph in 2016. A [three year follow up review of the Belfast scheme](#), published in 2022, found “little effect for reduction in road traffic collisions, casualties and speed when a 20 mph speed limit intervention is implemented in a city centre”.

However, rather than finding 20mph limits ineffective, the reviewers found:

The intervention was implemented at the city centre scale (only 76 streets) in comparison to the recent city-wide intervention in Edinburgh which showed significant reductions in road traffic speed, collisions and casualties. Large scale implementation of 20 mph speed limit interventions may be an important factor for effectiveness (scale).

A [2021 evaluation](#) of Edinburgh's city-wide scheme concluded it "was associated with meaningful reductions in traffic speeds". A [three year post implementation review](#) reported a 30% decrease in collisions and a 31% decrease in casualties.

Transport for London has [found similar results](#) for its wide-area scheme, with collisions falling 25% over two years to June 2022, and those resulting in death or serious injury down 24%.

Monitoring and review in Wales

Impact in pilot areas

As outlined, [pilots took place](#) in eight communities across Wales to trial 20mph default limits in the lead up to the national roll-out in September 2023.

The [first monitoring report](#) on the impact in pilot areas was published in March 2023, followed by a [final monitoring report](#) (for the pilot areas) in February 2024. Data up to May 2023 showed:

- "large positive" changes in relation to speed reduction Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and attitudes to active travel;
- a "slight positive" change in vehicle / pedestrian yield behaviour; and
- "no discernible change" in local air quality and "slight negative" changes in vehicle journey times, including a general decrease in punctuality for peak time bus services.

Monitoring the national roll-out and public opinion

In September 2023 Transport for Wales (TfW) published a [monitoring framework document](#) for the national roll-out. This identifies the policy objectives and the indicators to be used. Data will be collected for up to five years post-implementation. This includes "qualitative attitudinal surveys". The framework says:

We will examine the attitudes and perceptions of people living in areas where the speed limit has been reduced using attitudinal surveys after the national roll-out. The surveys will include questions on attitudes towards using active travel modes (walking, wheeling and cycling) for local journeys in built-up areas and will also consider respondents' perceptions on matters relating to traffic speed, traffic noise and effects on communities. There will be a particular focus on more vulnerable groups in society when collecting attitudinal data.

In terms of reporting timescales the framework says TfW will publish an interim report in June 2024 based on data collected during the first 6 months following the national roll-out. At the time of preparing this briefing this report has not been published. A report on the first full year of implementation is also expected in December 2024. Formal reporting will then take place annually.

Review of exceptions guidance

While the default 20mph speed limit is now in force on restricted roads, highway authorities (local authorities for local roads and the Welsh Ministers for trunk roads/motorways) can use Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) to change the limit from the default of 20mph where appropriate.

In November 2022 the Welsh Government issued guidance to highway authorities on the process for setting exceptions. However the Welsh Government has suggested that local authorities across Wales have interpreted the guidance differently. It therefore established a review team to examine how the guidance had been applied.

The review team published its initial report in February 2024 and its final report in May. The Welsh Government subsequently issued updated guidance for local authorities in July and says "from September, highway authorities can start to apply the new framework to assess speed limits on roads where a change is considered appropriate".

The Welsh Government has also launched a "national listening programme" on the policy and is asking the public to identify and report roads to the local highway authority where they believe the speed limit should change.

2. Welsh Government action

In a letter to the Chair dated 22 July on the petition calling for a Wales wide poll to establish the level of public support, the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Transport and North Wales, Ken Skates MS refers to the national listening campaign and the updated guidance discussed earlier. The Cabinet Secretary also suggests “there is no evidence to support the petitioner’s assertion that a majority of the population is against the default 20mph speed limit”. However a YouGov poll conducted in late July showed 72% oppose the policy.

The Cabinet Secretary has also written to the Chair in relation to the petition calling for a public inquiry (letter dated 16 July). The Cabinet Secretary again highlights the national listening campaign and updated guidance.

3. Welsh Parliament action

In July 2020 the Senedd debated the introduction of default 20mph speed limits with 45 of 53 Members voting in favour of the motion.

As outlined, the Welsh Government laid the Restricted Roads (20 mph Speed Limit) (Wales) Order in June 2022. The draft Order was passed by the Senedd in July 2022. It has been raised in the Senedd on numerous occasions.

In October 2023 the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee scrutinised the former Deputy Minister for Climate Change, Lee Waters MS on the policy.

The Committee has previously considered a number of petitions relating to the policy including:

- A petition calling on the Welsh Government to stop the introduction of the 20mph limit (considered in April 2022). At that time the Committee agreed to close the petition due to the ability of local authorities to change the limit on roads where 20mph would not be appropriate.
- A petition calling on the Welsh Government to hold a public poll on the speed limit reduction (considered in October 2022). This petition was also closed.

- A petition calling for a survey of residents living in the pilot areas (considered in March 2024). Again this petition was closed in light of monitoring work taking place through TfW.

In May a Plenary debate was held on the largest ever Senedd petition calling for the policy to be scrapped.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.