

LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
HIGHWAYS FORUM FOR HARBOROUGH

10TH MARCH 2010

20MPH ZONES ACROSS WHOLE SETTLEMENTS – THE PORTSMOUTH
EXPERIENCE

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of the report is to update Members on the initial findings of the application of whole settlement 20mph speed limits in Portsmouth.

Background

2. In March 2008, Portsmouth City Council (PCC) became the first city in Britain to implement 20 mph speed limits on almost all of its residential streets. The scheme uses signing alone (i.e. without traffic calming measures) and covers 410km of the 438km PCC road network road. The capital cost of implementing the scheme was £0.57 million.
3. On most of the roads where the new 20 mph speed limits were introduced, the average speeds before installation were less or equal to 24 mph. The relatively low speeds on these roads before the scheme implementation were mainly due to the narrow carriageways and high volume of on-street parking which restricts the effective road width. 20 mph limits were also introduced on roads within the area with median speeds above 24 mph in order to avoid inconsistencies within the area.
4. The scheme was implemented to support the low driving speed already adopted by many drivers in the area and encourage less aggressive driving behaviour from those who drove at inappropriate speeds. The intention was for the scheme to be self enforcing to avoid the need for additional police enforcement.
5. In August 2006, the Department for Transport (DfT) published Circular 1/06 'Setting local speed limits'. The main implication for the use of 20 mph speed limits was the relaxation of the speed criterion for their introduction. Government guidance in 1999 advocated that 20 mph speed limits should not be introduced if average speeds were greater than 20mph, but Circular 01/06 currently recommends 24 mph. If average speeds exceed 24 mph, additional engineering measures are required to reduce speeds.

Outcomes from the Portsmouth Scheme

6. The average speed after the 20 mph limits were imposed was 0.9 miles per hour lower than the average speed before the limits were imposed.

7. At sites where the average speed before implementation was greater than 24 mph, the average speed reduced by 7 miles per hour. Despite this reduction, 14 out of the 21 monitoring sites were still found to have average speeds between 24 mph and 29 mph after the scheme implementation (i.e. they are not self enforcing as intended).
8. Based on the data available for one year after scheme implementation, casualty benefits greater than the national average trend have not been shown. This may change as further data becomes available.
9. When the results of the Portsmouth scheme are compared to the effects of 20 mph zones with traffic calming features, it is evident that signing only schemes, even applied over a wide geographical area, are less effective in terms of casualty and speed reduction. 20 mph zones implemented with traffic calming features, where the initial speeds are greater than 24 mph, typically achieve average speed reduction of around 9 miles per hour.
10. Previous research completed by Transport for London shows that the implementation of 20 mph speed signs alone result in a 1 mile per hour reduction in speed, comparable to the findings in Portsmouth.

National Guidance On 20 mph speed restrictions

11. The Department for Transport (DfT) is currently consulting on changes to the national guidance on the implementation of 20 mph speed restrictions (current set out in DfT Circular 1/06 'Setting local speed limits' describe above in paragraph 5).
12. The proposed revisions to the guidance are:
 - Highway authorities to introduce, over time, 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, where these are not part of any major through route.
 - Clarify that highway authorities have flexibility in the use of 20 mph zones and limits, and should apply the option best suited to the local circumstances and that brings most benefits in terms of casualty reductions and wider community benefits.
 - Draw attention to the initial evidence from the trial of wide area signed-only 20mph limits in Portsmouth, and want to make clear that 20 mph limits over a number of roads may be appropriate elsewhere.
 - Set out that DfT will consider the requirements for calming measures in 20 mph zones as part of the DfT's Traffic Signs Policy Review. In exceptional cases, the Department could also look at giving special authorisation for the use of 20 mph repeater signs, including with accompanying painted roundels, instead of calming measures, on individual streets with low average speeds within a 20 mph zone. Decisions will, however, be made on a case by case basis.
 - In addition to better road safety outcomes, DfT will also look for the use of 20mph restrictions to contribute to the DfT's other goals, including for the economy, emissions, equality of opportunity and quality of life.

13. It is anticipated that the revised national guidance will be published by the DfT in summer 2010. Once published, our current approach to the use of 20 mph speed restrictions will be reviewed.

Conclusion

14. Based upon the Portsmouth experience yielding negligible benefits, the County Council does not intend following Portsmouth's example. Instead, it will continue to apply appropriate traffic management control to individual sites, as at present.

Officer to Contact

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Background Papers

Report to the Harborough Highway Forum Report – 17th September 2008 - "Widening of 20 mph zones across whole settlements"